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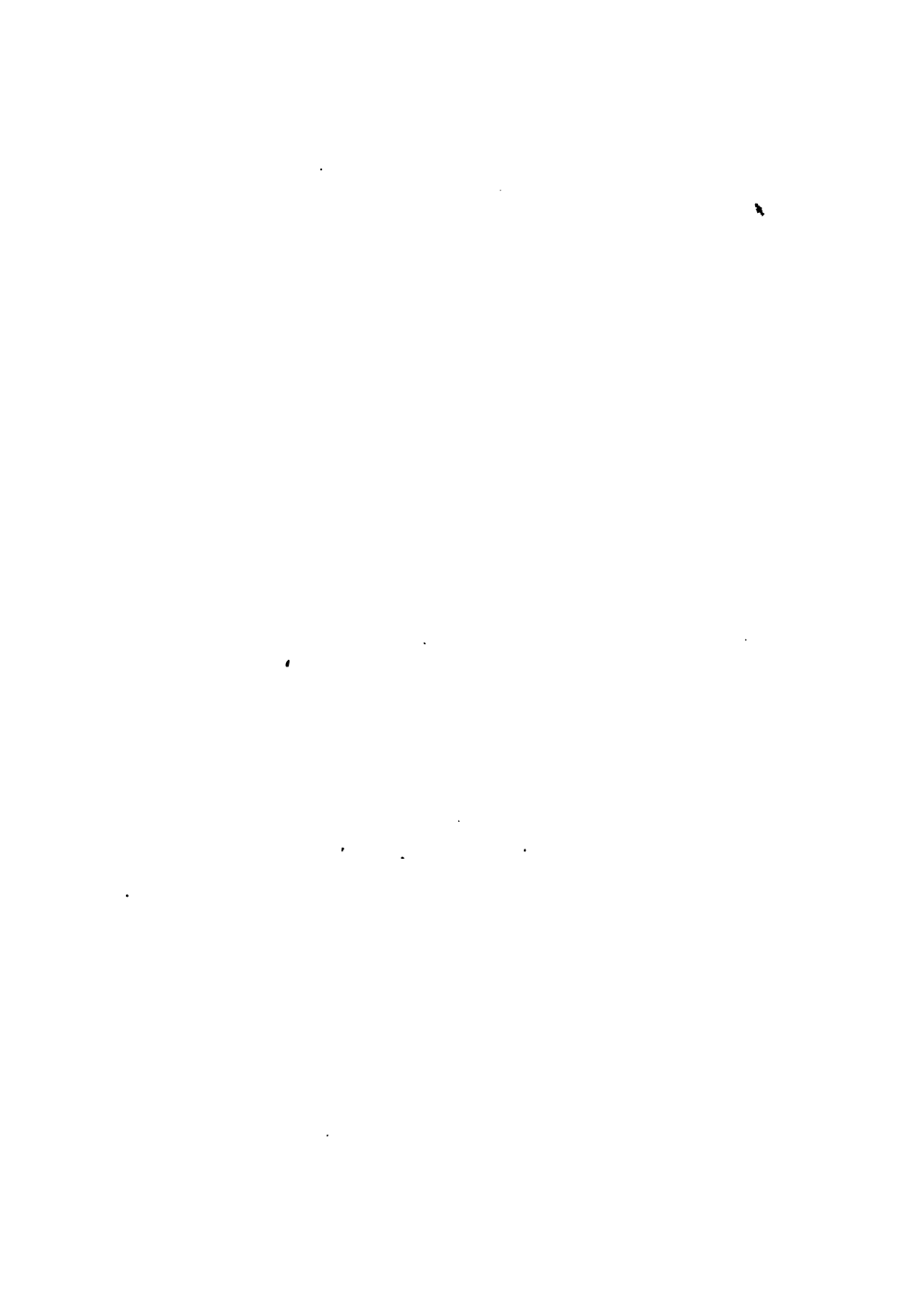
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OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE

A NOVEL

BY

EDGAR FAWCETT

Author of "An Ambitious Woman," "A New York Family," "The Evil That Men Do," "A Gentleman of Leisure," "The New Nero," "A Mild Barbarian," etc., etc.

PRINTED IN PERIODICAL FORM AS "A MARTYR OF DESTINY"

NEW YORK
THE CONCORD PRESS
C. T. DILLINGHAM & CO., AGENTS
1894

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OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE

[A MARTYR OF DESTINY.]

I.

AT Riverview, but a brief railway ride from New York, there are many lordly and beautiful homes, and there are not a few lowly and plain ones. Among the latter was a small cottage, close to the rather ugly and huddled little village itself, where Basil Moncrieffe dwelt with his friend, Magnus Whitewright.

The two young men, each scarcely past his thirtieth year, were decisive opposites. Moncrieffe had a tall figure, supple and virile; Whitewright was of medium stature, and almost ethereally slim. Moncrieffe carried himself with an air; Whitewright drooped his frame, though not his gaze. Moncrieffe had a scant, upcurving flaxen mustache, and a beard of the same hue, with its hairs all seeming to bend toward a point at the chin, like fibers of a corn-tassel toward its apex; Whitewright's face was beardless and somewhat wasted, with a little hollow below it, made by the chronic looseness of his shirt-collar about a throat where the larynx gave too cumbrous a bulge and the pathetically fibrous tract just under this receded too far. Moncrieffe

had brows of a good breadth, which overswept eyes bluer than gray in some lights, in others grayer than blue; Whitewright's eyes were night itself, with just a pin-point of flame afloat in either pupil.

Their coming together, like this, here in River-view, had been both commonplace and strange. At the New York medical college where they had both studied to be physicians, they had hardly exchanged five words in as many months. Whitewright had looked haler, then, and not so wistfully interesting. A little while before their common graduation the subtle change of illness had come upon him. It was because Moncrieffe noticed this that a certain conversation occurred.

"You're a bit pulled down, aren't you?" he said, one day, to his classmate.

"Yes," was the answer, with a smile oddly cheerful. "I've been expecting it, and it's come."

"My dear fellow, what is it that you mean 'has come'?" And Moncrieffe dropped a hand on the other's unrobust shoulder.

Then, without a hint of self-pity, and indeed with a certain incongruous buoyancy, Whitewright said that three of his sisters had died of consumption, that he was the only child left, and that his father's dream of one day seeing him a successful physician would never be realized.

"You don't mean," said Moncrieffe, with dismayed gravity, "that you think yourself really so far gone as that?"

"Oh, I'm galloping off at a pretty quick rate."



And here the young man laughed as if he had said something highly droll. There was not the faintest hint of affectation in his sunny way of looking straight at darkness—that last blackest of all darkness, too, from which the recoil of youth is so instinctive. “Dad’s the dearest old chap in the world,” he pursued, with a frankness that pained his listener like something bladed and cutting, “and when I do go I’m sure it will break him up very badly. You see, I’m not only the apple of his eye, nowadays, but lid, lashes and all. Mother died years ago, and it’s always been his dream to make me what he’d once have delighted to be himself—a medical man with a snug practice. He’s merely an apothecary at Riverview. Know Riverview?”

“Only as a colony of palace-dwellers,” replied Moncrieffe. “I’ve nothing to take me into such luxurious dominions,” he added, with gentle serio-comedy.

But, as it queerly turned out, he had this same Magnus Whitewright to take him there. These co-disciples, who had hardly done more than nod to one another till both were on the verge of securing their diplomas, all at once became intimate friends. Pity had a good deal to do with Moncrieffe’s first amical impulse. It compassionately thrilled him to see with what genial fortitude Whitewright had accepted the somber destiny of an early death. Then, a little later, the sudden end of his father, the apothecary at Riverview, fed in Moncrieffe a growing admiration. Whitewright bore this keen bereavement as a

veteran of tried courage might bear an ugly shot-wound.

"Nothing downs you," said to him the young man who was now every day growing his faster friend. "If death doesn't, I suppose poverty wouldn't. But you haven't poverty to fight, anyway. Thank God for that!"

Whitewright caught the speaker's hand, and wrung it with his white, bony fingers, hot below their pallor. "Thank *you*," he muttered, "Basil Moncrieffe, for thanking God on my account!" He let the dusk of his eyes, feminine yet manly in their look, dwell for a minute on Moncrieffe's face, so healthfully the counterpart of his own. "Dad's gone, now, and I'm still here. I may stumble on for some time yet. I begin to think my mortuary gallop is only a kind of light canter, after all. No, I *haven't* got poverty to fight; there's a moderate little pile of dollars hedged between myself and destitution."

"Just about my own case," Moncrieffe returned.

"Ah, yes, old boy. But you've got your ambition in a splendid state of vitality. Mine's dead, just as its former proprietor shortly expects to be."

"Come, now," began Moncrieffe, with a rallying mock-irritation. "I'll live, Whitewright, to see you the pet doctor of all those millionaires at Riverview."

"You'll live to see yourself that, if you choose to quit the mad competition of this huge, fevered *metropolis*. There's the little ancestral shanty

of a drug-store, with its big pink and blue glass demijohns in the windows, that I used to coo-coo at when a baby. There's also the little ancestral shanty of a house where I was born. It's decent enough, and with a few architectural Queen-Annish furbelows tacked on it, like discreet darns on a mature stocking, and with a few quick-growing vines made to muffle some of its more uncouth angularities, it could be turned, I think, passably pretty. How about a modest silver-plated decoration on one side of the front entrance, perpetuating this simple legend: *Dr. B. Moncrieffe*?"

"What!" came the stammered answer. "You can't be thinking, Magnus— Yes, I see you *are*! But then, you know, I've had such different views. I've dreamed, one might say—"

"Of superb fees from New York plutocrats. Of course you have; all young doctors *do*. But Riverview, as you've found out, has a number of New York plutocrats, and its two or three resident physicians are gentlemen of rather drowsy progressiveness. The whole modish suburb, my boy, might prove a facile stepping-stone to future metropolitan eminence."

"Very true." And Moncrieffe gave to his tapering beard a fluttered hand-stroke. "But the other side of the doorway, Magnus? That, surely, should bear the name of *Dr. M. White-wright*."

"Not a bit of it, my friend. A tombstone will bear it before long, in a graveyard not far away."

"How horrible!"

"It isn't horrible to me," smiled Whitewright. "I accept it with the serenest philosophy."

"I know you're nothing if not stoical."

"I hope I'm nothing if not sensible. My poor old father sent me to Columbia College and made me what people would call the first gentleman in a race of humble provincialists. Then he had me trained in the study of medicine. So far so good. At the end of his loving educational advancements, I heard the knell of doom sound in my spirit. It might have been a peal of joy-bells—as with your stalwart and energetic self. Well, it wasn't, and I simply accept the immutable fact that it wasn't, and that the eternal mystery of things thus had decreed. Why *not* accept it? Why struggle and wriggle like a fly in a cobweb? Struggling and wriggling don't either annoy or amuse the Spider that watches and waits. He's implacable; he has two names; one of them is Cause and the other is Effect. He is descended from an interminable race of spiders, all bearing precisely the same dual appellation. . . . There's so much in dying with dignity. It isn't as if a fellow could take the affair in his own hands. Call it stoicism, if you please, but why not call it good taste?"

"What a fatalist you are, Magnus! Napoleon wasn't a greater one."

Whitewright gave a gay shrug. "Napoleon? Oh, he had a stout pair of lungs, and could verify his theory by living. I must take mine on trust. I don't so much mean it's all being a *severe necessity*, a monstrous *Must*. I believe

that, firmly enough; but just now I'd reference to the unimportance of everything. It's a prodigiously consoling outlook for a chap like me to take. Nothing particularly matters, because everything that could happen is so minute an aid to some gigantic scheme of whose machinery, as one might say, one sees only a faint little whirling portion—hardly even that—the flicker of the shadow of the fragment of a cog-wheel, or yet, hardly even *that*! A few centuries hence, and though I might have lived till eighty the adored arch-practitioner of Riverview, my having laid young bones instead of old ones in the cemetery of which I told you will be no more than that canoe of the poet

“ ‘Which crossed the bosom of a lonely lake
A thousand years ago.’ ”

And so, my best of Basils,” he went blithely on, “you will see me, if you care to come to Riverview and look, placidly serving behind my little counter in the paternal shop, with my haughty soul humbled to the concoction of liver-pills and cough-mixtures, and all my past hopes of distinction folded away in some cabinet-drawer of memory, like a lavendered waistcoat too dainty for rustic donning.”

“Magnus!” exclaimed Moncrieffe, “you can’t possibly intend to settle down as a country druggist—you!”

But Whitewright did. Previous to this step, however, Moncrieffe prevailed upon his friend to take with him a Western trip. For six months

they lived together in the dry, pure, crystal air of a settlement among the Rocky Mountains, with peaks a hundred miles off that looked as if one might stroll between breakfast and luncheon along their shaggy sides. Here Whitewright grew markedly better. His spirits, too, gained in the way of easy levity, yet the note in them of what might be termed jovial despair neither waxed nor waned.

"You're tremendously improved," Moncrieffe assured him, just before their return eastward.

"Come, now, don't you *feel* I'm right?"

"Yes; I grant it."

"You haven't coughed for a fortnight."

"True; it's a kind of reprieve. My execution is postponed. You're like a clever lawyer, Basil; you've got a stay of proceedings."

"I do wish, Magnus, that you'd let up on that death's-head-and-cross-bones kind of jollity."

"I will. Anything to please you." They had just selected their places in a drawing-room car. Before speaking again, Whitewright wreathed an arm about his companion's neck, with a girlishly effusive way he had which the men he treated so (they were few) always liked and felt gladdened by. "Now for something on *your* part that will please *me*."

His hearer at once perceived exactly what he meant. They talked it over as the train swept them to Chicago. During the rest of the journey Moncrieffe gave reluctant yet decisive consent.

He was ambitious; he believed himself able to *start out* in New York and hew his way with

swift blows right to a starting-point of moderate success there as a practicing doctor. But, after all, as Whitewright had clearly put it, Riverview *was* an excellent stepping-stone. It was full of people who kept their fine houses open till almost the beginning of winter, and when winter came it still held no mean share of city magnates who had resolved to breast boreal rigors between walls whose comforts and luxuries robbed such defiance of the least rashness. Besides, Moncrieffe had no ties of kindred to make him crave New York as a dwelling-place. His parents had died there years ago, and the small heritage they left him had fallen to an only child. Even his guardian, an elderly uncle, was now no more, and as for other relations, these were all both unsympathetic and remote.

It came to pass precisely as Whitewright had wished if not prophesied. They reached Riverview in the first vague blush of April. Before the month was ended Moncrieffe had professionally though unassumingly announced himself to the township, and Whitewright, without a tinge of dejection, with a good deal of tranquil self-effacement, had taken from a trusted clerk the place of supervisor at his late father's unpretending little shop. Five minutes' walk brought one to the doorway where now gleamed Moncrieffe's name. By May the small house had begun to lose its grimness, touches of picturesque carpentry having worked wonders with its gaunt exterior. Midsummer had scarcely come before Moncrieffe found himself distinctly more than

a nominal guardian of the public health. His patients were mostly among the poor village-classes, at first, and though he had possessed himself of a good horse and a neat, newish-looking light-wagon, the demands upon him in the way of driving about with a country physician's air of responsible employment staid cheerlessly few. But one evening there came a sudden change in what might be called the social tone of his patronage. He and Whitewright had just finished their six o'clock dinner, and had both come forth on the pretty porch which had recently replaced one of ancient and ramshackle ugliness. Moncrieffe had lighted a cigar, and was holding it blue-spiraled between two fingers while he laughed at some gentle drollery with which his friend had answered his accusations of having made a very discouraging and invalidish kind of repast.

"Here's Dunstan Thirlwall," suddenly said Whitewright, as a kind of shabby dog-cart, drawn by a big, bony horse, entered the gateway just opposite.

"Who's Dunstan Thirlwall?" asked Moncrieffe quickly, seeing that the small circular approach of their lawn drive left him slight time for explanatory asides.

"He's the biggest snob in Riverview," said Whitewright, with equal speed. "And I suppose, considering all the plutocrats who've clustered here, that to call him so is to mean volumes."

In another moment Mr. Dunstan Thirlwall,

so to speak, was upon them. He pulled up his awkward horse with a short jerk that made the animal fling skyward his lantern-jawed head.

"I want Dr. Moncrieffe," rang a voice, in bluff staccato. "Where can I find him?"

II.

"I AM he," said Moncrieffe, advancing a little. "Can I be of any service?"

"Yes, you can, doctor," said the young man, not with incivility, yet with a chill bluntness quite his own. "Our old physician, Dr. Bascomb, is too ill to attend my mother—Mrs. Thirlwall, you know."

"Ah, you are Mr. Thirlwall, then?"

The man in the dog-cart stared, and soon curtly nodded. "I thought you knew me."

"I haven't had that pleasure—till now."

Whitewright moved away, muttering in quick, gleeful soliloquy: "Basil took him down a peg *there*!"

"Oh, ah, yes," replied Dunstan Thirlwall, with cold rumination, fixing his gaze for a second on one upheld hand, as though to survey some rent in his dog-skin driving-glove. "My people have been such an eternity in these parts, you see—"

"And I," said Moncrieffe, "have been here but a few trifling yesterdays. Hence I must be pardoned for not knowing, as it were, the River-view immortals."

Thirlwall lifted his brows, as if the thought behind them were one of surprise that a humble-lodged village doctor should make an attempt to be clever. Moncrieffe, warned by Whitewright's late nimble and scorching comment, puffed coolly at his cigar till Mr. Thirlwall altered his supercilious look. Through the azure mist of that cigar the two men's eyes met. In a minute or so more of silence there seemed to flash between them the intelligence of a mutual forthcoming dislike.

But Thirlwall's voice was almost bland when he next spoke. "My mother isn't at all well. She's had one of her sudden attacks—they always come when least expected. If you'll jump in here and let me drive you to our house—it's about two miles away—I'll see that you get back comfortably in this same trap. I've been delayed in finding you; I'm afraid the case is pretty urgent. *Will* you jump right in?"

"Yes," said Moncrieffe, after a very short pause. "Excuse me a moment, please." He turned to look for his friend, and glimpsed him at the further end of the narrow hall. Whitewright slipped into the little sitting-room as he saw him advance. Moncrieffe followed, and they met thus in sudden ambush.

"I heard," Whitewright said, in semitone. "Of course you'll go. The mother has heart-disease, and knows it, poor lady. You'll be sure to like her; everybody does. Old Mr. Thirlwall's been dead several years. No one dreamed he wasn't a millionaire till he died and left his family very little money, and acres on acres of

rather unprofitable land. There are two children, this Dunstan fellow, and a hunchback sister (a sort of semi-mindless grown-up baby besides) whom they say that he loathes and is ashamed of. He's a dismal example of how ungracefully we human beings can sometimes bear disappointments. He was put to school for several years in England, and grew up expecting thousands galore. His father's losses in business have soured him to the bone—and when a narrow egotist like that becomes soured it's Heaven help his near relations. He hates Greendingle, as their place has been called since almost Revolutionary days. He spends a week at a time, very often, in town. Nobody knows just how he lives, belonging to fashionable clubs and cutting a dash in society as Mr. Dunstan Vander-vender Thirlwall. But the family are cramped, it's said, by his cruel selfishness. He gets away, I've been told, with three-quarters of their meager income. But I mustn't keep you. There's this, though, to add. You'll meet the loveliest girl at Greendingle you've ever yet laid eyes on."

"Ah, that's an inducement to make me leave you here for an hour or so, reading by lamplight among the suicidal night-moths. And this divinity isn't a Thirlwall?"

"No—yes."

"No? Yes? How odd!"

"Go, now, dear boy," said Whitewright, with a soft propulsive push. "I don't want you to keep away from Mrs. Thirlwall a minute longer

than you can help. She was always very good to my poor father, over there at the shop. Many a chat they've had together; dad swore by her."

"And the girl—the *other* girl, Magnus, *not* the imbecile hunchback, but the—the Seek-no-Further. Do post me about her, please."

"Never mind, just now; I can't. There's not time enough. It's a sad history, but it's also an inspiring one."

"You imply that it's a very mysterious one," said Moncrieffe, across his shoulder, as he went out to rejoin Dunstan Thirlwall. Then he paused, wheeled about, and caught White-wright by the wrist. "There—take care of yourself, old chap," he said. This had grown a kind of habitual farewell formula with him, of late. His augmented fondness for his friend had given it the veiled yet vivid meaning of a "God bless you." His vigilance had partaken both of affection and science. He realized that this man, whom he had grown tenderly to love, was shadowed by a dark physical threat. It might be delayed for years, and it might wreak itself in the abruptest ruining way.

"Tell me the lovely creature's name, at least," he demanded. "You say that she isn't a Thirlwall, and yet that she *is*."

"Oh, she's a *Thirlwall*," assented White-wright. "She's *called* so, I mean. She's the adopted daughter of Dunstan's mother."

"Ah—is that all?"

"No—it isn't all. It isn't a *bit* all. Her name? Her name's Eloise."

"Eloise Thirlwall?"

"Yes; I suppose so."

"You suppose so? Don't you know? Hasn't she any name that you don't 'suppose' about, one way or the other?"

Whitewright gave his head an amiably exasperated toss. Then, with great speed, he spoke more. "She's been with Mrs. Thirlwall for years. There's a story about her birth and adoption that's no doubt a perfectly true one. Ogden Thirlwall, Dunstan's father's brother, was a man possibly much like himself—worldly, narrow, unmoral. One day he died suddenly, and after his death the report of his false marriage and fathership of a young child, now orphaned, reached Mrs. Thirlwall's ears. Perhaps there was no false marriage at all; perhaps Eloise's birth was still more pathetic than that. But Mrs. Thirlwall, against the wishes of her husband who was then living, sought and found the baby girl, and brought her home and has been devotedly maternal to her ever since. They say that when her sweet, kind eyes first lighted on little Eloise she was in some dreadful slummish hole, neglected so frightfully that the clothes were almost rotting off her tiny shape."

"Yes—I see. And this is the woman I am to go and try to aid this evening?"

"Yes. And now do go and try to aid her, Basil! The delay—"

"Pshaw; it hasn't been more than the merest handful of seconds. You've talked like lightning, and so have I. There, now—I *will* go.

But tell me: how do they say that this Dunstan Thirlwall treats his left-handed cousin?"

"Shockingly. I've heard that he detests her presence in the house."

"The devil he does! How delightful for *her*! And she's really so very sweet?"

"Wait till you see her."

"I shan't wait another minute," said Moncrieffe, laughing. "You've applied an effective spur."

He mounted to a seat beside Dunstan Thirlwall with a smile on his lips. They had got well out upon the main road before either of them spoke.

"You've come here to stay, doctor?"

"Yes. That is my intention—as long as there's any necessity for a graveyard."

Dunstan laughed with such matter-of-course curtness at his grim little joke that he regretted having made it. "You're living with that Whitewright fellow, I understand—the apothecary's son."

"I'm living with Mr. Whitewright."

"M—yes. I used to know old Whitewright. Evvrybody in Riverview did, of course. Queer old duffer. Had a head as bald as a billiard-ball for years, and cherished stern antipathy to a wig. Once, when I was a boy, I popped a pea at him from a shooter and hit him right on the crown of the cranium."

"Yes? What brutes we all are when boys, aren't we?"

Dunstan started a little, and then struck his

lumbering horse a sharp whip-blow that made him break into a kind of solemn, reproachful canter. Moncrieffe stole a glance at the young man's profile. Its upper lip was cut downward at the end in a weary and sneering way, though you felt that perhaps it could pulse upward quite smilingly at will, just as the hard, handsome, icy eye could at will wear a clement sparkle. The small russet mustache grew fluffily close to the cold-curved nose, and a dim network of wrinkles at the bone of the oval, untinted cheek spoke more of owls'-feet from late hours than crows'-feet from sane dealings with unavoidable time. At the temple, shaded by the gay-ribboned straw hat, was a segment of crisp, yellowish hair, cut short above a small, back-pressed ear.

"Here's a man who can please women if he tries," Moncrieffe decided. "He's good-looking, and he's got it in him to pass for rarely amiable if he chooses, despite all the badness I've just heard about him."

"I suppose most boys *are* brutes," Dunstan said, shortly and low-voiced. "I'm devilish sure *I* was one."

"That's a candid confession, Mr. Thirlwall."

The burly horse shied at a gargoylish stump bulging from an embankment on the roadside. With his long-lashed whip Dunstan gave him a reprimanding sting on his lank neck.

"Confound *this* brute! He's got neither sense nor speed nor pluck nor action nor--anything. He's simply an old cow. Most boys could show

better qualities than *he* does, doctor. But about your friend—the son of the druggist. We used to understand, here at Riverview, that he was going in for a fine gentleman—a practicing physician, and all that sort of thing. He didn't, though, did he? He just settled down into the old paternal grooves. How was that?"

"My friend, Magnus Whitewright, started with ambitions to be a doctor," said Moncrieffe. "But illness has prevented him from pursuing such designs. He has pulmonary weakness, Mr. Thirlwall, and he very sensibly realizes that the career of a physician would overweight him."

"M—yes. I see."

"I don't know whether, as you phrase it, he ever intended to go in for a *fine* gentleman. But education and study have made him a *gentleman*, beyond doubt."

"Really?"

Moncrieffe, for a little while, leaned back in the dog-cart and let that "Really" pierce him with its irritating poignance. Then he told himself that he would be a sad fool to heed the flimsy arrogance of a person with a mental range as contracted as was broad and lovely the landscape through which he moved.

A wet June had made its foliage richly verdant. Robust trees massed their dark-green densities, now and then, against a sky where the midsummer sun was westering with splendid grace. He gave his blinding glare only at intervals, and then to blaze, for a moment, on some hollow where a stream sparkled amid caressing

willows, on some breadth of rolling meadow where cows grazed languidly. In another second he was barred with purplish parallels of cloud, that softened his rays if they did not actually gloom them, and left dusky and mystic lights on a pearl-topped clump of elders, or wrung somber and sickly gleams from a lissome populace of breezy reeds at the verge of some pool.

"I hope we shall not find your mother very ill," said Moncrieffe, with a deliberate change of subject.

"No," came the colorless answer, "I hope not. She was weak and drowsy when I left her, with no desire to speak. Utter prostration, you know. I was just on my way to Newport this morning, when the attack came on. I was going to stay there with some people. Of course I had to put it off, and telegraph, and all that sort of thing."

"That was—inconvenient."

"It's been distressing, naturally." He almost growled out the next words, as if through set teeth, and with an air of more than half addressing his own thoughts. "I'm getting used to these infernal disappointments, however. It looks as if I were to have them feed me, with a kind of pap-spoon, by destiny for the rest of my days." Then, with the demeanor of having repented this condescension in the way of over-garrulity, he straightened himself and pointed swingingly with his whip-hand toward a clustered sweep of woodland pierced vaguely by a chimneyed roof.

"That's Greendingle. I imagine you don't

know it yet. It's horribly ugly as architecture, but fairly comfortable inside. The estate is really enormous. I don't mind saying that it keeps us land-poor, with taxes and all that deviltry. Still, you may have heard of the new railroad that's being planned hereabouts. If they carry it out it will run straight through our property for several miles." He made another oscillant gesture. "From yonder, I mean, where you see that old wind-mill, right along to here, and past here for a good stretch. It will mean a big pot of money to us, for the new company can't close their contracts till our demands have been settled."

As Dunstan ended, the wagon swept round a bend of road that commanded, beyond brief meadowy interspaces, a white-sprinkled expanse, which to look upon was to recognize its pathetic meaning.

Half in humorous vein, Moncrieffe said:

"The new railroad can't very well go *there*."

"It wants to," returned Dunstan Thirlwall, in sturdy monotone. "At least through a part."

"What! Of the Riverview graveyard?"

"A *part*—yes."

"How horrible!"

Dunstan set his head sideways and shrugged his shoulders. "*We* don't think so. At least, I don't. None of *us* are buried in the particular part gloated over. It's chiefly occupied, I believe, by the remains of Riverviewians who haven't any living descendants. Just before my father died there was a huge outcry of senti-

mentalists. He yielded to it, and for this very reason, perhaps, the whole railroad project now hangs fire."

"I should think it might!" Moncrieffe flung out, emotionally.

He wondered, at the same instant, if Magnus Whitewright's father were buried in the threatened part of this old-time cemetery, and felt a new surge of dislike for his associate creep through every fiber of his frame.

III.

DUNSTAN THIRLWALL had not underestimated the charms of his family abode. It was ungainly, with mammoth wooden pillars, white and fluted, towering to the little shingled slice of overlapping roof which they rather ridiculously supported. But inside it was full of graceful proofs that its habitants knew how to live with blended taste and ease. Its neglected lawns and somewhat weedy paths were less pleasing than its wide hall, made almost room-like with great cushioned lounges and woolly rugs, whence Dunstan and Moncrieffe passed into a sitting-room winsome both for elegance and comfort.

"Be seated, please," Dunstan said, "and I'll see—"

But he ended there, for a young woman now glided swiftly into the large, pleasant chamber.

"Dunstan," she said, with anxiety in her voice, "you've brought the doctor?"

"Yes."

Without waiting for an introduction the newcomer went straight to Moncrieffe and put out her hand. "Doctor," she said, "I'm very glad you've arrived. My aunt is a trifle better, and we think the attack is passing off. But it has left her very weak. Will you come up to her room, please?"

Moncrieffe at once followed the speaker upstairs. Dunstan seemed to have resolved himself into a natural nullity, now, before this new feminine presence, at once so emphatic and so captivating. Her sunshine had dissipated him, and though a kind of pensive sunshine, it was yet curiously potent. She was, of course, Eloise Thirlwall, and thoughts of her strangely sad place in the world thrilled him now that he had seen her. The halls and the staircase by which he accompanied her to the apartment of her aunt, gave him but fitful glimpses of a face he had already seen full and clear, with a surprised, comprehensive enjoyment in the vision.

It was a face so girlish that you wondered it could also be so womanly. It had a sweet keenness of coloring, but beyond that no definable "points" of beauty. It was, in a way, generous of structure, like the maidenly amplitude of the tallish figure. But its expression alone justified its attractiveness. You could best have said of the eyes that they were sincere and courageous;

of the brow that it was broad and capable; of the mouth that it could be both tender and firm. Moncrieffe, while at times moving a few paces behind her, was sensible of an added pictorial pleasure in the thick strands of chestnut hair, rolled up from the milky nape of her neck, just neatly enough to escape the charge of negligence, and somehow in bounteous accord with her rich if immature moldings.

At a certain closed door on the second hall she paused, and said softly, with her hand on the knob:

"Now will you come right in, please? Aunt is much stronger, and quite conscious."

Then she opened the door of a large bedroom, prettily appointed, with green sweeps of afternoon landscape showing at its wide-open windows. Mrs. Thirlwall, a rather stout lady with sunny violet eyes and benignant on every feature of a face that might once have been beautiful, spoke from the bed before Eloise and her companion had more than half crossed the spacious chamber.

"I'm not half ill enough to see a doctor. By to-morrow I shall probably be up and about. It's the most amazing thing, the way I sink right down, and then rally again." She stretched out a hand to Moncrieffe, which he not only took, but retained, with professional gentleness. "So you're Dr. Moncrieffe?" she went on, with a smile that struck him as exquisitely genial. It was a smile that disclosed her teeth, remarkably pure and flawless for a woman of her evident

years. "I'm very glad to see you, doctor, though a little while ago I'm afraid you'd have found me neither glad nor sorry. They say that I just dropped off in a dead faint and stayed so a perfect age. Eloise, bring the doctor a chair; that's right, my dear." Moncrieffe had seated himself at the bedside when Mrs. Thirlwall again spoke, this time addressing an elderly maid-servant who stood in respectful quiescence beside her pillow. "And Margaret, you can take Miss Anita downstairs now, and try to amuse her with a little stroll about the grounds."

"No, no, no," whimpered a voice from one of the windows. Moncrieffe turned and saw a childish though writhen shape, with the face of a grown-up girl crowded in between frail, high-bulging shoulders. "I want to stay here with you, mamma," the voice went on, in that piping falsetto treble that so often leaves the lips of the deformed. "I want to! I want to!" And then a kind of impish screech ensued, as Margaret advanced toward the window.

"Never mind," said another voice, authoritative yet kindly. "You needn't go with Margaret. You shall go with me."

A claw-like hand clutched Eloise's, and a giggle answered her, vacuous but placated. It was evident that to "go" anywhere with her cousin meant for the half-witted little creature all desirable content. Presently Moncrieffe was alone beside his patient, even the servant having departed; and looking at him with soft fixity, Mrs. Thirlwall said:

“That dear niece of mine has managed to leave us together for a short time, doctor. It was just like her careful tact. She knew that I could speak with more point and freedom if we were quite without listeners. I am not in the least doubt concerning the character of my ailment. It’s a valvular weakness, with a tendency to heart-failure. I had a long talk with the famous authority on cardiac troubles, Dr. Wingate, more than five years ago. He then told me that my case was wholly incurable.”

Moncrieffe’s fingers were on her pulse. “I have known Dr. Wingate to make mistakes, Mrs. Thirlwall. I shall ask you a few questions, now. Pray answer each of them with deliberation, for my power to help you in any material way will depend on the perfect accuracy of your statements.”

His repose, frankness, and unobtrusive self-reliance made a look of interest and surprise light the face of his listener.

“I’ll answer with the best conscience I can muster,” she said; and a certain rare cordiality and good cheer beamed from her features, which were somewhat pallid and fatigued, yet without a trace of the invalid’s emaciation or languor. “As you see, doctor, I am almost well and strong again, now. This is so often the way with heart-disease. One may have a foot in the grave and yet seem as if both feet were so securely on the upper surface of *terra firma* !”

Moncrieffe slowly bowed his head. “Yes; that is true. I’m not old in my profession, Mrs. Thirl-

wall, but I believe that in cases of heart-trouble much may be done that as yet has been done ill or not at all."

"Really?" She touched his hand caressingly with her fingers while he still held her wrist. The slight action was both motherly and fond. Moncrieffe's ambition underwent a thrill, and it has been said that he was ambitious. He felt that here was a chance of gaining some sort of initial distinction, while at the same time testing practically the results of some very hard and patient study. Simultaneously, too, he recalled Whitewright's words, "You'll be sure to like her; everybody does." He had got greatly to like her, indeed, here within a few fleet minutes; and now it was pleasantly plain to him that he was liked in return. And such a result already translated its lure to him in terms more subtle than those of flattering self-love; for was not this the woman who had acted with such human bravery toward the ill-fated girl—somehow as unusual of aspect as her supple and rhythmic name—whom he had looked on only to admire?

"I have gone into this malady a great deal," he continued, "and have found that both the French and Germans excel us in our grasp and search of it. And of course, in the hospitals, we've every means of observing its various developments. . . . Now, then, for the questions, Mrs. Thirlwall," he ended, with a smile.

. She gave him just the thoughtful and detailed *responses* that he desired. And when his cour-

teous yet shrewd little cross-examination was over he made certain physical tests, which he told her that he should hope soon to repeat more satisfactorily, with the aid of instruments.

"And assure yourself," she said, in a quaint mood of sad gayety, "that I am a doomed woman."

"Perhaps far from that. In a case like yours we are none of us knowably doomed. But I was thinking of something else—of how much, in fact, might be done by science to keep these ugly seizures at bay. For though she has still a very great deal to learn, every year she manages to learn a little more."

"Ah, that is true! And one day she will begin to solve the mightier mysteries."

"Do you believe that, Mrs. Thirlwall?" he asked astonishedly.

"Yes." Lying there before him, she closed her eyes, and as often happens in sleep, new traits of expression crept into her pale, fatigued, yet not seemingly unhealthful face. Mingled with her look of charity was one of trouble and suffering that he had failed before to mark. As she reopened her eyes a lingering sigh fluttered from her lips. "Oh, yes; I believe now that knowledge is everything. Once I did not. The struggle was terrible with me. I suppose mine is what they call the religious temperament. Faith had meant so much to me! I seemed to feel it die in agony, like a limb that had been crushed and must be lopped off. Do you know, too, I trembled for what the change might effect

in my moral life? All the help that I gave to my fellow-creatures (not that it was much, but it was something) had seemed to flow straight from that faith. The surrender of a palpable, tangible Revelation cost me a fearful ordeal. Mere reason seemed so cold and aidless after that loving divinity, that providential succor, in which I had trusted implicitly for years! And the sense of my own constant bodily menace grew so much harder to bear! Is it not Huxley who says that the slaying of a beautiful hypothesis by an ugly fact is one of the great tragedies of science? My awakening into rationalism partook of just that tragic element. I've had my bereavements, my trials, as every man or woman of my age has had them. But religion had softened them so! To find its consolation crumble into ashes, and to face the sternness of a new creed (dignified and honorable, if one pleases, but perfectly comfortless) dizzied and dismayed me." Here the speaker broke off, with a faint laugh of sudden embarrassment. "But what will you think of me for making this confession? It is my way to be expansive with people at a moment's notice—with people, I mean, who please me as you have done." She now caught Moncrieffe's hand and shook it in her own soft and largish one, with an abrupt cordiality. "I *can* tell you this, with propriety, doctor, can't I?" she went on. "It would be different if I were not a talkative old woman, prattling to somebody young enough to be her son."

As those two words, "her son," were spoken, Moncrieffe either saw or fancied that he saw a kind of shadow touch her face.

She had forcibly stimulated and attracted him. He returned the pressure of her hand with possibly more warmth than he was aware of.

"My dear Mrs. Thirlwall," he said. "I can feel for you and with you more deeply than at first thought you might guess. What you say only convinces me of the truth that religion was made for sorrow."

"Yes! Happiness does not need it," she murmured. "It is a star, a pilot star, and darkness first gave it birth."

"And in that pilotage you have now no trust?"

"None! But I once had, as I have told you, and the trust was inestimably sweet!" She paused, and a fresh ardor, if it were not too melancholy to be named so, filled her gaze. "I sometimes think myself the strangest product—a sort of end-of-the-century anomaly. I have actually found myself praying that I might once again pray!"

"You mean—?"

"Oh, with the old lovely, self-surrendering impulse! Consistent infidels would have none of me, I am sure, and the authentic Christians would hold me in meek discountenance."

"Authentic Christians?" repeated Moncrieffe, with a bitter inflection. "How few of them are ever met!"

"I know one—my niece, Eloise."

He gave a slight start. "You're not sympathetic, then?"

"Perfectly. I revere her belief. It almost makes a new religion for myself. I watch it as if it were some structure with spires and turrets too ethereal for the rough storms it must confront. And yet it is marvelously firm. That comforts me—I mean for the dear girl's own sake, in the years when I am gone. But all this time I have perhaps been dealing rude shocks to your orthodoxy."

"Mine?" He spoke almost absently. He was thinking of Eloise Thirlwall in this new and gracious light with which a few enthusiastic words had caressingly clothed her. "Mine?" he again repeated. "Ah, my dear lady, I'm afraid I've neither orthodoxy nor heresy. I've fallen—" He stopped dead short, and seemed to question his own mind for a second. "I've fallen," he soon resumed, "into what I fear you would term an apathetic mental habit. Yet it is not apathetic; it is only dispassionately reflective. Perhaps I too am an end-of-the-century anomaly."

"You are—indifferent, then?"

"I suppose I am critical," his grave voice loitered. "Or why not call it impersonal? There is a line somewhere in Tennyscn,

"Holding no creed, yet contemplating all."

Possibly that just expresses me. I—"

But here his face clouded solicitously, and he rested a hand on the arm of his patient.

"*Would it not be best,*" he said, "for you to

let yourself drop away, easily and peacefully, into a long, refreshing sleep?"

"Oh, doctor, *yes*, if I only could!"

"We will manage that if we can, and I think we can." He was a young physician, but he spoke with the soothing and responsible air that belongs to a born one. At this point he rose, and just then, most opportunely, Eloise reappeared. Moncrieffe addressed her in a low voice, saying that he would like to send a prescription at once to the village, and have it made up there with all possible speed.

One side of her underlip slanted itself beneath the upper, and an anxious tensity touched the verges of her nostrils.

"You think, then, it is so urgent a matter?" she faltered.

"Not now—no. It was, before I got here; but the urgency has passed." He loudened his tones, continuing: "I hope your aunt will let us darken the room. Every minute of sleep that she gets between now and morning will work for her precious benefit." He readvanced toward the bed. "Even if you don't sleep till my prescription comes back from the village, Mrs. Thirlwall—"

"I'll try to, all the same," she broke in, with a drolly complaisant merriment. "But only on one condition—that you go downstairs and have a nice talk with my niece from now till the prescription reaches us. Don't look confused, Eloise. I want you and Dr. Moncrieffe to know one another. I'm sure you'll get on famously.

I've lost my poor old troublesome heart to him already; haven't I, doctor?"

"I do wish you had, Mrs. Thirlwall," said Moncrieffe, in jocular semitone. "I'd try to give you back a brand-new one. As it is, I'm going to try and do some professional repairing with it, if you'll only let me."

"Hear him, Eloise," came buoyantly from the bed. "Isn't he charming? You can't guess how strong and wise he can be, as well. He's been saying things to me that I shall dream about, gratefully and hopefully, if I *do* fall asleep before the prescription comes. He's right in the front van of modern workers; he's full of the scientific spirit, and you know how *that* sort of thing takes hold of *me*. I'm so enamored of him that I'm going to be generous and give him to you for a jealous interval, provided he promises to administer his own dose in person as soon as it's procured."

When Moncrieffe's medical message had been written and consigned to a servant, he and Eloise left the still, book-crowded library in which he had found pen, ink and paper, and went downstairs together. Twilight had now begun to weave its dusky spells on the lawn. They seated themselves in two big wicker-work chairs on the long, narrow piazza.

"It's very cheering," said Eloise, "to learn that you are in hopes my aunt will soon quite recover."

"*Quite* recover, Miss Thirlwall? I wish I *could* have prophesied so brightly as that!"

"Yes—I understand. Her disease is beyond real cure, but you may possibly arrest it and keep her alive even for years to come?" She looked at him with beseeching inquiry as she paused.

"That is what I should say there was decided probability of my doing," he answered. "But, frankly," he added, "I am surprised at your aunt's sudden confidence in me. She knows nothing about me, as I take it, except that I have come here to Riverview as a young physician, without support of the least social kind."

Eloise looked at him astonishedly. "But Aunt Emily *did* know about you, of course."

"Oh, really," said Moncrieffe, with a relieved accent.

"You've been here for some time, have you not?"

"I've had my shingle up, as the lawyers say, since early spring."

"Yes. Well, Riverview, you know, is a small place."

"It's a wondrously thrifty one."

"Thrifty isn't just the word."

"Well, then, luxurious—plutocratic."

"There you describe it better. . . . As I said, Aunt Emily had heard of you, because you've been going among the poorer classes here, and she goes among them, too."

"And do you accompany her, may I ask?"

"Sometimes; rather often, in fact. But there are not many of them. The prosperous predominate."

"So I thought, Miss Thirlwall." Moncrieffe leaned forward a little. "I suppose you're well aware how deeply your aunt is attached to you?"

He slipped back into his chair, biting his lips and feeling that to this acquaintance of less than an hour his personal note had meant almost an insolence. But she gave him quick courage by her unhardening demeanor. She appeared to have a part in the sweet naturalness of the glooming grasses and the ebon articulations of the lace-like tree-boughs against golden sunset air, as she replied, with her face all simple fervor and her hands at quiet contact in her lap.

"I think I know the full depth of that dear soul's love for me! I ought to know it!" And then he saw that she was mastering certain quivers about her mouth, which her next words betrayed, as it were, despite the swift control she had used.

"I—I hate to even *fancy* her gone. It's a kind of passionate selfishness with me. I—I don't know what I should do if I lost her! I should be so strangely and hopelessly alone!"

In another instant she had risen, and was close beside the arm of Moncrieffe's chair. "Aunt likes you, *believes* in you! I read her so well! And her intuitions are rarely in error. Oh, if you could only *keep her alive* for a few more years! That is what she wants because she knows how intensely *I* want it. I—I don't mean, Dr. Moncrieffe, that she wouldn't want it *anyway*; she clings to life as all strong and large natures do and must. But there's that

other incentive—a splendidly generous one. Some time, when I know you better—if I ever do know you better—I might say more. I tried, once, to say something of the sort to old Dr. Bascomb, after she had had an attack like this. But he repelled me by a kind of genial obtuseness. He comprehended my feelings, my position” (she shot her head to right and left, here, as if in sudden dread of listeners), “more than you can do, as a matter of course. But he somehow failed to give me a word of real sympathy. I—I said to him with what was perhaps a horrible sort of candor: ‘It’s agonizing to have her die *at all*, but to have her die *now* is like the earth sinking beneath my feet.’ I must have been hysterical. I’ve gained self-control since then. I mean never to let myself go like that again. But, still—”

Here she suddenly paused. Moncrieffe got up from his chair, and took one of her hands, which she instantly withdrew, receding from him at the same moment.

“But, *still*,” she went on, with vocal breaks and tremors, “I’ve always wanted to *beg* some physician to do his *best* with her—to keep her from dying and leaving me—to use that very science which she so firmly trusts, and use it with all his finest force and skill!”

She swept her handkerchief across both eyes, but not so soon that her watcher failed to see the tears which had started and sparkled there.

“It’s so absurd of me, and it’s so childish, too,” she continued, in a much calmer voice.

"But some time when you come again, as you surely *will* often come, I'll explain whatever seems curious in my acts or words."

Just then a voice sounded from the doorway, whence Dunstan came sauntering. "Oh, you're here," he said, with languid ambiguity. Then, directly to Moncrieffe: "Are you leaving so soon, doctor?"

"No; not yet. Not till after my prescription comes. I wish to watch its effect."

He spoke civilly enough, but a perfect chill of inward repugnance had taken hold of him. When, a minute later, Dunstan drew forth a silver cigarette-case, opened it, and extended it toward him, saying coolly, "Will you smoke?" he bowed polite refusal. But he had an impulse, at the same time, to snatch the shining little bauble from his host's hand and fling it into the young man's demure and decorous face.

IV.

FOR Magnus Whitewright's words, vividly recalled during the drive to Greendingle, were now still more reassertive in his thought. He had possessed himself, so to speak, of the key to Eloise's odd behavior, and hence both pity and indignation replaced what surprise it might otherwise have wrought in him.

Here, on the old-fashioned portico of this retired and semi-colonial estate, with its emerald

acres dimpling just beyond him in suave mid-summer twilight, he was pierced by a sense of the tragedy which circumstance had summoned him to face. A glance at Dunstan made it plain enough that with insolent antagonism he could turn into torture the days of his ill-starred cousin. A glance at Eloise showed with what suffering yet heroic patience she probably bore his cynic taunts.

"It may be a melodramatic view to take of this gelid and smooth young aristocrat," ran Moncrieffe's rapid deductions; "but I can almost fancy him glad to the inmost center of his worldly soul if he were left motherless, cousinless and sisterless by some agency like a convenient lightning-bolt or a sudden infectious disease. That noble and large-souled woman upstairs is very possibly a bore to him, with her sympathies and humanities and cordialities that he comprehends about as clearly as a miser would comprehend a philanthropist. His poor little sister, with her deformed shape and fragmentary mind, is no doubt a bore as well, instead of touching him into tenderness through the grotesque and uncouth pathos of her affliction. And this Eloise, this broad-browed girl, with her look of mingled strength and truth, with her quick-convincing air of being a power for good, and with her strangely piteous inheritance of shame, she, too, bores him—she, too, is a continual thorn in his dainty flesh. Ah, how easy to read her anguish of dread at the thought of her aunt's death! Mrs.

Thirlwall, devotedly loved, would, in dying, leave this girl a far bitterer doom than merely to mourn her loss. She would leave her a sorrow shot through with helpless terror."

Dunstan lit a cigarette, though the breeze that came rustling hardily from knoll and slope made him round both hands about his flickering taper, and crook both knees in watchful tendance of its flame. Throwing away the burned remnant, he readdressed Moncrieffe through a smoke-cloud:

"So you think your patient well enough to leave her, doctor? That's encouraging, isn't it?"

"Very," said Moncrieffe. They all stood together in a sort of angular trio, now. Eloise had drawn a little into the background. "I've had the room darkened; your mother has kindly consented to this arrangement until the prescription reaches us. I'm glad of it, because I prefer greatly that she should gain whatever natural sleep may come to her."

"I'm afraid she will not sleep a wink," said Eloise, looking at Moncrieffe and not at her cousin.

"She seemed drowsy and tired when I last saw her," said Dunstan, also looking at Moncrieffe. "I told you that, doctor, if you recollect, while we drove over." He now glanced across his shoulder at Eloise with a fleeting stare. "Miss Thirlwall, here, is fond of the dark sides of things. I imagine she's perfectly convinced, at present, that my mother will toss on her pillow till morning."

Eloise's eyes moved with determined softness toward those of her cousin. The survey cost her a secret effort, betrayed by a vague, strained expression in the lines of throat and chin.

"Please don't make Dr. Moncrieffe think me so gloomy of spirit, Dunstan," she said.

"Bless me," came his answer, while he puffed at his cigarette, "are you already so anxious for his good opinion?"

The levity of this reply had only what one would call the society tone; but Moncrieffe was quick to follow it up by saying:

"I'm already very anxious for Miss Thirlwall's good opinion."

"Really?" shrugged Dunstan. "How promising a case, doctor, of mutual approbation!" He swept Moncrieffe's face with a frigidly quizzical glance. "Be careful. Riverview is a hot-bed of gossip, though it seems to be so harmlessly respectable."

"I think it, so far, very respectable," said Moncrieffe, with a random air of deflecting the conversational current.

"It's amusingly so," struck in Eloise, as though to abet his disclosed project. "I often wonder if there is any other New York suburb as glitteringly prosperous."

"Hoboken Heights, perhaps, or Long Island City," suggested Dunstan, with a satire more weary than jocose.

"How he flings his petty rebuffs at her!" thought Moncrieffe. Just then Eloise's laugh sprang silvery on the silence. It cut the young

doctor; it had too propitiating a ring; he would have preferred that Eloise should not humor her cousin's paltry joke.

"Really," he said, turning to her, "River-view is a colony of palaces. While I drive about it I wonder if in time somebody will not make a petition at Albany to have it rechristened Millionairsville."

Dunstan laughed at this, but restrictedly, as though it were the rough material of a good thing which somebody else might say better. His manner pricked Moncrieffe anew, but he spoke with lazy unconsciousness of any such puncture.

"Riverview is to my mind an elegant, opulent, ceremonious hole. A lot of rich people, for the most part rather refined, have gathered together here in a lot of handsome houses, for no conceivable purpose but to show each other the darkest and direst meanings of social stupidity. They're just a large enough body, all told, to be abominably provincial, and they're just a small enough one to think themselves the reverse. In the winter they put on the airs of a Newport during August, and in the summer they behave as if they were a New York during January. You're asked to a decent dinner-party here and you're expected to talk of it as if it had been a Patriarchs' Ball. And every course you've eaten, and the exact number of the footmen in waiting, and the precise toilet of every woman present, is a matter of nine days' cackle. On the tenth day somebody gives

another dinner-party, and then, in a similar vein, the cackle recommences. And then, if there happens to be another affair of the same sort nine days later, the extremely fashionable gayety of Riverview is a new cause for cackling afresh."

Dunstan had finished his cigarette, and now walked to the edge of the piazza and threw the little smoking stump out on the graveled drive, with a sort of cultured savagery in his gesture.

The next minute something made him turn sharply. It was his sister, Anita, who came hurrying from the inner hall, with her woman's face, her childishy peevish expression, and her forlorn deformity. She wavered toward Eloise with piteous, crippled pace, and clutched the girl's gown in triumphant capture.

"I've got you again," she cried. "They won't let me go to mamma's room, and I wasn't going to stay off there in the garden. I hate the garden; I'm sick and tired of it. Why can't I be with you if mamma wants to go to sleep? And why does she want to go to sleep so early? Margaret says the room's dark and she's all alone. Let us go and stay there, anyhow, Cousin Eloise. We can keep ever so still, and perhaps I'll go to sleep, too, if it's *real* dark, and you'll tell me a story and let me lay my head on your lap."

Eloise stooped caressingly, and began whispering certain words, inaudible to both her observers.

"Anita," said Dunstan, with abrupt and low-voiced command, "you can't go into your

mother's room, and you can't stay here, [fretting and fuming.]”

His sister scowled at him, and spitefully showed her tongue. Then she suddenly burst into a raucous cry and hid her face in Eloise's draperies, tugging at them with both tiny hands.

Eloise stroked the silky auburn hair of her little cousin's bowed head, almost the only endowment of an unabnormal kind that nature had given her, and this in a manner mockingly beautiful.

“Dunstan,” she pleaded, “let the child stay with me here.” (Everybody at Greendingle always spoke of Anita as a “child,” though she would be twenty her next birthday.) “Aunt Emily's illness has made her nervous, but I'm sure that in a few minutes—if she only keeps at my side like this—she will be quite quiet and not cause the least trouble.”

“No,” opposed Dunstan. “It's not the place for her here. Mother's illness has got about, by this time, I'm nearly certain; and if any people should come driving up to the house it would look—” He paused, and floated an uneasy glance toward Moncrieffe, swiftly withdrawing it, perhaps because of the hard visual response it met. He seemed willing to leave his sentence unfinished, less from embarrassment than defiance. With a short toss of the head, however, he began another, which proved almost as short. “There's no kindness to Anita in coddling her whims and freaks before strangers.”

Scarcely had he thus spoken than his sister, glaring at him across one distorted shoulder, burst into that paroxysmal kind of grief which very young children show. She held her breath, with back-flung head, after a brief shriek. Eloise, with a twitch of pain at the lips, leaned down and caught her from the floor in both arms. Her weight was hardly more than a child's, and if it were taxing, Anita's young kinswoman gave no sign of this. She hurried into the house with her burden, but not too soon for a most lusty roar to crash upon the evening stillness.

Dunstan broke into a low, disgusted laugh. When he looked at Moncrieffe he saw that the latter, with back turned full upon him and head slightly aslant, seemed watching a black, volatile cloud of birds that dropped above the smoky gold of the horizon in all the loitering grace of a spent sky-rocket's earthward sparks.

"A most unmanageable little vixen, that sister of mine," Dunstan broke silence. "Of course we're hugely sorry for her, but giving the poor little thing her head whenever she wants it would be the wildest folly."

Moncrieffe, having slowly confronted his host, replied with the vaguest of non-committal nods. Eloise's entreating eyes yet haunted him, and her assurance, too, that the "child" would keep decorous if allowed to remain here in her company. Plainly this humane brother thought Anita's mere presence a nuisance, and made a point of having her hustled out of his sight at the faintest excuse for such evanishment.

"There!" exclaimed Dunstan, in another moment, peering toward a distant gate. "It's just as I said. Somebody's driving in. It's the Blagdons' carriage." There seemed in his voice a ring of contempt queerly blended with one of respect. "You know about the Blagdons, of course."

"I've seen their very handsome house and grounds."

"You'll not find the lord of the manor quite so handsome, I'm afraid, though he's certainly picturesque."

"There's a daughter, is there not?" asked Moucrieffe.

"Oh, yes," replied Dunstan, with one of his thin, scrappy laughs. "There's decidedly a daughter; there's very much of a daughter indeed. . . ."

Meanwhile Eloise had got her clamorous cousin off into a corner of the library, and was fondling and humoring her with hopes of quiescence. She had long ago admitted that she "spoiled" Anita, but then to look on that cramped body and to think of that thwarted brain was often to feel against nature's own spoliation a thrill indignant as it was idle. There were times when the hunchback's double affliction, both physical and mental, was like a voice crying out in its very silence against the injustice of so harsh a curse. But to-day her ruminations took a different turn; an egotistic tint pervaded them. Anita's outburst had partaken of real hysteria, this time, for she felt to-

ward her brother that species of repulsion which we see in a spiteful animal toward certain human beings who have maltreated it: she mingled antipathy with fear. Horribly afraid of him, she ventured only to express her abhorrence in malicious grimaces and snarls. They were the malign part of her, like a dumb, sleepy consciousness of her untoward lot. Ordinarily they did not rise to the surface; nothing very often rose to the surface with her, except an infantile petulance or a passionate animal-like affection; and this latter took one of two forms, tenacious fondness either for Eloise or her mother. But years of association with Dunstan had made her ready to show him sputtering and futile revolt at an instant's notice. It was like the hiss and glare of an angered kitten, but to Eloise and her aunt it was fraught with grievous regret.

All this was an old story for the girl now; and as Anita sobbed herself to sleep, with frail arms clasped about her neck, Eloise fell to thinking of her own fate. She was not bitter by temperament; courage and good cheer were her native atmosphere. But now her aunt's alarming attack had told discordantly on her nerves. She realized a certain willfulness in her own optimism. Caught by the feeble yet fervent clasp of her deformed little cousin, she told herself that they two, seated here like this, were akin in destiny as in blood.

"And yet I'd change places with her now, this very evening," she miserably mused. "Her

misfortune—is it not almost trivial beside mine? She cannot realize the blow that has been dealt her; every pang that my hurt brings me seems to quiver with a new quality of pain. Yesterday it was wrought by some slur of Dunstan's; this morning by a shade of patronage in the bow from her carriage of that self-contained Mrs. Cassilis; later, by the sudden illness of dear Aunt Emily; and later still, by the conception that this new young doctor, with his look of strength and honesty, might soon hear from others what something was all the while making me long to tell him myself!"

She stooped and looked at the narrow, wizened face just below her breast, with its closed eyelids and a tear gleaming on one of its pallid little convex cheeks. "Ah, yes, Nita, poor Nita," her passionate thoughts ran on, "I'd rather be you than be myself! For they only pity you, and your dim mind doesn't even care for that. But I have to bear their contempt—their illogical, brutal, semi-conscious contempt! As if I did not know" (and here her full underlip quivered and her large eyes moistened shinningly) "what the women say of me behind my back! As if I did not hear them tell one another—these fine feminine gentlefolk of River-view—that it would be a mercy for me to marry even moderately well! This would give me a name, at least, they murmur among themselves, in their gossipy afternoon visits at one another's handsome houses. They say it to their husbands and their brothers. They marvel at

Aunt Emily's 'courage' and 'unconventionalism.' Oh, as if I didn't hear it all in spirit better than though my ears had heard it in the flesh!"

She bent closer above the small, pinched face. "Yes, Nita," swept on her turbid introspections, "I *would*, this hour, be you rather than myself! . . . I would—yes, before the God that I believe in, though so many are doubting Him at this latter day!"

A turn in the swift current of her own dreary meditation gave her a new vista of feeling. Hope rallied at the silent inward mention of that Presence which she supremely trusted. Her face softened, brightened. With great tenderness and caution she rose, carrying Anita in her arms, and placed her on a lounge full of soft cushions. It was yet several hours before her little cousin's bed-time, and she doubted if this slumber, the result of exhaustion, might long endure. Still, the recumbent shape, while she stood and watched it, gave no sign of stirring. And now, thus watching it, Eloise felt as if dark curtains of mist were being slowly drawn from her soul.

"Despair and I part company," she almost whispered aloud, her lips faintly moving. "I might have known that mournful mood would vanish. There's always comfort for one that has faith, as I have, in the eternal goodness of things. I'm brave again now—as brave in my way as Aunt Emily was in hers, when she went and found me hidden amid poverty and filth,

and gave me her protecting love through all those after years." A smile here flooded her face, and nobly beautified it. "Ah, as if I hadn't *that* to be thankful for!"

"Miss Eloise."

It was Anita's nurse, who had entered unheard. The girl raised her hand in quick motion, and then pointed with it to the couch. After that she talked for a little while with the nurse in low tones.

"Look me up, Margaret, if she should wake suddenly and want me *very* much. Her mother's attack has got her into a nervous state, and I'm afraid this sleep won't last long. I'm going upstairs to listen at Mrs. Thirlwall's door for a minute, and I do so hope I'll find that *she's* fallen asleep. Afterward I may be out on the piazza with the new doctor; he's waiting for his prescription to come from the village."

"He's gone into the parlor now, miss," replied Margaret, "with Mr. Dunstan and the others."

"The others? Why, who, Margaret?"

"Oh, quite a company, miss—"

Just then a shrill laugh, muffled by remoteness, drifted to their ears.

"Elma Blagdon's laugh," decided Eloise. "She's heard of Aunt Emily's illness, no doubt. How bad news travels in a place like this! Unless I'm wrong, Dunstan would marry her to-morrow, if she'd let him, just for her father's millions. He'll take her coming as a personal honor; it will console him for being delayed in

his trip to Newport. Shall I go into the drawing-room if I find Aunt Emily does not need me upstairs? Why not? My spleenful vapors have departed, now. I'm my own sane self again . . . And besides, Dr. Moncrieffe's there, of course, waiting for the prescription. I *must* see *him* before he leaves, *anyway*."

For several minutes after she had gained the door of her aunt's bedroom she stood listening. No sign of restlessness reached her. Then she softly unclosed the door. The room had been so darkened that the dreamy golden light outside made only thin threads of luminance at the shut edges of the blinds. Very softly she stole nearer to the bed on which her aunt lay. Beside the dimly visible face and bosom, she waited. Then came a faint, respiratory sound that filled her with joy.

"Aunt's in a peaceful sleep," was her thought, while she slipped from the room again as noiselessly as if she were treading on snow. "I'll bring him that good news. Something about him, just in the short time that I've known him, makes me feel that he'll be glad in a sort of human, unprofessional way, different from poor old Dr. Bascomb's. What *is* there about him that so pleases and interests? I wonder if everybody feels the same strong but delicate spell. Aunt Emily did—I'm sure of it, though I've not yet had the chance to talk of him with her. Still, I *saw* that he'd charmed her, knowing her as I do."

A little later Eloise approached the drawing-

room. Quite a babble of voices reigned there. But as she entered, it dwindled to almost a stillness.

V.

ALL the grand folk in Riverview (and its wealthy land-owners might have resented any less dignified title) regarded Eloise precisely as we have heard her own somber reflections declare. They liked her from the personal point of view, but from the social one they regarded her with commiserating dismay. Her aunt had had a Knickerbocker maiden name dear to the new rich, and among Riverview grandees the element of the new rich was predominant. Mrs. Thirlwall was not to be ignored, even though she might choose to dally with perilous foibles. Eloise was one of these. "You hardly know how to *treat* the girl," a certain strait-laced Riverviewian had said. And she treated her with just that doubt, only shrouding it in a suspicious politeness. Eloise detected the false flavor of her amenities and in return treated the lady ever afterward with hueless reserve. Her aunt scented the truth, and almost cut the same lady in consequence. This was a warning to the others, and they heeded it. But Eloise *perceived that they heeded it*, and a stab was in that very discovery. She came forward, now, with easy grace and greeted the four *guests* in the drawing-room.

"We are so glad," said Mrs. Pinckney Cassilis, "to hear that your aunt is better."

"Very, *very* glad," said Mr. Pinckney Cassilis, in a species of suave echo.

"I simply couldn't stay *away*," shrilled Elma Blagdon. "She once told me she had heart-trouble, and I wasn't surprised. She makes you think she's *all* heart, the moment you've got really to know her."

"The news give my girl a reel shock," said Mr. Abijah Blagdon, fondling his daughter with spectacled eyes. "Didn't it, El?"

"I guess it *did*!" assented the young heiress, without even a glance at her father. "*Mercy!* I don't know what we should do at Riverview, Miss Thirlwall, if anything happened to your aunt." The young lady suddenly aired a rattling laugh and pointed her parasol at Dunstan. She looked about the room, sweeping her eyes from face to face. "It's given *him* a scare!" She then tossed toward Dunstan one slim hand, clad in a long tawny glove of Swedish kid. "He had his traps almost packed for Newport. Serves him right, though, doesn't it? He's always thinking of himself. He needs to be pulled up once in a while, just to punish his conceit."

"Oh, come, now," remonstrated Pinckney Cassilis. "You're a little hard, Miss Elma, are you not?"

"Pinckney," shot in his wife, crisply, "it's no affair of *yours*, anyhow."

"Gracious!" cried Elma, with a measuring

glance at Cassilis, from crown to boot-sole. "How your wife sets you down! I'd kick, if I were you; but you never kick. See here, Mrs. Cassilis," she flashed on, "some day I'm going to put some spirit into that husband of yours. Yes, I am! I'm going to flirt with him like mad. And when he's just wild about me, and you're crazy with jealousy, I'm going to say to him: 'Now, strike for your rights, and tell your wife that if she don't stop snubbing you, there's a divorce court in Dakota, and we'll both take a parlor-car for it on the morning train.'"

Mrs. Cassilis looked amiably bored, while a titter broke from Dunstan.

"Oh, El," smiled her father, "how that tongue o' yours can skip along!" And then he gazed round at the assembled auditors with his heavy, sallow visage puckered by paternal pride.

Mrs. Cassilis, who chanced to be seated near Moncrieffe, said to him, in a lowered voice that had not the least seeming hint of pique:

"Miss Blagdon wakes us all up so. Had you met her before?"

"No," replied Moncrieffe. "I'm still a stranger here."

Mrs. Cassilis gave him one of her complete, clear-edged smiles. Everything about her was obvious, promptly determinable. You somehow took her in at a glance, as if she had been a white strip of sand under a cloudless sky. She appeared to have no reservations, no subtleties. Such as she was, she was that in unrestricted entirety. Not that she impressed you with any

idea of sincerity and candor. But, on the other hand, her gracious and affable glare of personality involved no hint of deceit. To Moncrieffe her limpid eyes were provokingly round and blue, her mouth, chin, brows and tintings provokingly fresh and regular, her trim-bodied bust and neat-compressed waist provokingly symmetric. She seemed to him, as he quietly watched her, the incarnation of conventional nicety. She affected him just as charmlessly as a piece of arithmetic would have done, if disclosed in colors instead of the ordinary black and white. He somehow caught himself disliking her for being so shallowly composite, so unengagingly correct. She reminded him of certain lyrics which he had read in magazines, lukewarmly approved and speedily forgotten.

"Oh, but you're *not* such a stranger," said Mrs. Cassilis. "We have all seen you driving round; we've known of your *being* here; we've talked about you. . . ." She now showed him her beautiful, milky teeth in an affluent smile. . . "We've even gossiped about you, and wondered if you were as nice as you looked."

"Ah," said Moncrieffe, "then you've been setting for me a standard to which I must live up. I only wish that I could do so."

"You'll have one advantage," said the lady, with neutral sociality. "I mean the absence of all rivalry. They say that poor dear old Dr. Bascomb will never practice again."

"That's my chance, I suppose. One nail drives out another."

"You like the idea of having your chance, then? You're anxious to push on, to succeed, and all that?" She did not wait for his reply, but continued: "I think your face shows much energy, and that is the chief source of success, isn't it?"

"Faces are poor portraits of character, I sometimes am led to conclude, Mrs. Cassilis."

He joined his hands lightly together and jolted them up and down, with either elbow on either knee. This gave him a leaning posture in her direction, and she herself leaned graciously forward a little to answer it.

"Oh, yes, you're quite right. Faces are dreadful falsifiers." Her voice was keyed very low. "Miss Elma Blagdon's face, for instance. Would you imagine, to look at her, that she was so very bold?"

"You mean—vocally?"

"Oh, she *speaks* boldly enough. But, then, she *acts* even more boldly still. She does precisely as she pleases. I never saw anything like the universal toleration she receives. You've just heard her; you understand. But that isn't a circumstance to the things that she has often both said and done. I say she looks like a vestal virgin and behaves like a bacchante. Am I right?"

"I can't answer as regards the behavior," trimmed Moncrieffe, in politic undertone. "But as for the looks—well, she surely appears innocent."

"Doesn't she?" kindled Mrs. Cassilis, yet

with smoldering composure. "Just see that pale, narrowish face, with the big, white-lidded eyes and the prim, proper little mouth that might be a nun's. You men never notice women's clothes, but everything she's got on is of the very choicest. That white *jabot* is worth—well, you'll think me vulgar. And Heaven knows, *she's* vulgar enough. You mustn't take her as a specimen of Riverview refinement."

"Ah," said Moncrieffe, shaking his head, "do not tempt me into rash personalities."

"That's *charming*," murmured Mrs. Cassilis. "*She* wouldn't think so; she hasn't the delicacy of perception to *feel* those delightful little speeches, which all refined women treasure, no matter how insincere they may judge them. . . . But Elma has excellent traits of another sort. She's good-hearted and she's loyal. She'd make a devoted wife. She might not always be a *comfortable* one, but she'd be true as steel—I'll say *that* of her. And—" Here Mrs. Cassilis looked transiently troubled and gave her head a fluttered toss. "As for being a *match*, you know, she's one of the best in the whole country. Perhaps you haven't heard about her father? He's horrible, perfectly horrible, but he's worth six or seven millions, and she's his only child. They came here and built that monstrous stone palace down by the river, about six years ago. Mr. Blagdon made his money in patent medicines. That is, he began so. First he brought out some popular 'water' or 'ointment,' or Heaven knows what. It partially failed, I'm told, and then, with the

sum thus secured, he bought an interest in something called 'Nervaline,' a popular tonic. For several years he defaced the landscape of his native country with flamboyant statements about the precious properties of this drug. Then he became full possessor of it, and gradually got his grasp upon other quackeries, pills, lotions, cosmetics, all with highfalutin befooling names. Then he began to purchase real estate, and after a few more years he became a financial king. Meanwhile his only child, Elma, had grown up, and returned to his hearthstone after several years of foreign schooling. Whatever they've done in a social way, as yet, has been entirely of her devising. Not that they've done much. She doesn't make any real effort. She rather sneers at the 'Four Hundred,' and all that. She likes it here, and often stays here till late on into the winter. She winds *him* round her finger. He hates to be idle; he wants to go back among his patent medicines; he longs for new salves and elixirs to conquer. But she won't hear of it; she keeps him in a continual state of unrelieved boredom and paternal adoration. I never saw anything at once so romantic and so ludicrous as the way in which he worships her. I often wonder if he doesn't expect her to make a great match, some day. But no; he wouldn't presume to argue the question with her if she decided to-morrow to marry one of the grooms. He'd simply settle a big lot of money on the groom, I imagine, provided she

said 'do it.' Whenever she says 'do it,' he meekly and sweetly *does*. Really," ended Mrs. Cassilis, in her crisp, authoritative style, "there was never such a chance for a would-be son-in-law to Croesus."

"And has the daughter of Croesus many eager applicants?" asked Moncrieffe.

- "No—very few. Elma is all caprice and whimsicality in *that* respect. Of course, you know, Dunstan Thirlwall, here, is dying to marry her. But she snubs him without a spark of mercy. He'll never get her. It would be a good match on both sides, for Dunstan could give her position. But she doesn't care a fig for position. If she did she could get it. Here she has it; everybody calls on her here, and often she tears round the place alone on horse-back, looking like crazy Jane (whoever crazy Jane was), and does generally quite as she pleases. If she chose to lift her finger in New York the swells would all flock round her. That's the way of things nowadays, you know. A girl with the prospect of all that money, who can really behave like a lady when she tries, can slip into the most exclusive drawing-rooms before you know she's really there. . . I do hope she'll marry sensibly when she *does* marry. But her great trouble is that she's so shockingly uncivil to almost every young man she meets. . . Now, you, for instance, Dr. Moncrieffe; I am really amazed that she's treated you as she has."

"Treated me? Why, she hasn't treated me at all. She's merely stared at me and asked me

if I supposed many people in Riverview would employ a doctor of my youth and inexperience."

"That's a great deal—for *her*."

"Really? It appears very little—to *me*."

"She'll show you more attention, if you care to receive it. Perhaps you don't."

The bland blue eyes were fixed, now, upon Moncrieffe's face with an intensity that puzzled him. Had this woman, after all, the capacity of hidden meanings, despite her apparent sharp-edged superficiality?

"I am afraid that I don't," he smiled.

"But if she's nice to you?"

"I shall be nice in return, I hope."

"You hope? You don't know, then?"

"I could know better if I knew Miss Blagdon better."

"But you know she's enormously rich?"

"Oh, yes; that seems to be quite an adamantine fact."

"But it's a fact that many men of your age would think immensely important."

She did not say "many men of your age and your limited income;" but he felt that this ample statement had been implied, and drew himself up, a little haughtily.

"There are many men of my age, Mrs. Cassilis, whose tastes and tendencies I could scarcely be expected to share."

"Oh, of course. But still—"

Here Elma Blagdon shot in a laugh of saucy mockery. "It isn't fair to monopolize the new doctor as you're doing, Mrs. Cassilis. Male

society in Riverview is altogether too great a rarity. I don't doubt Miss Thirlwall is secretly furious, and I'm openly so."

Mrs. Cassilis pushed out her pink underlip, humoring the girl's random satire, though perhaps reluctantly.

"Don't you forget Mr. Thirlwall and my husband?" she tossed back. "Really, Dr. Moncrieffe and I think you're paying them both a very poor compliment."

"Oh, I'm afraid to *look* at your husband," cried Elma. "And as for Mr. Dunstan Thirlwall, he's sulking because he's been cut off in the flower of his intended trip to Newport."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Cassilis, coloring a little and smiling more broadly to conceal it, as women will sometimes do. "I thought you announced, a minute ago, your intention of flirting madly with my husband. Now is your opportunity. Mr. Thirlwall, being *distract*, as you declare him, will bury himself in temporary solitude just to oblige you, and Miss Thirlwall will perhaps come over and join *us*; for *we* haven't yet reached the frenzied state of flirtation, have we, doctor?"

All this was said rather effectively, and proved a cogent if brief damper upon the volatile spirits of Elma. Yet it was said in the secure, even voice of one whose emotions were under an almost thorough control, like a well-oiled mechanism. Still, there are systems of machinery that strike fire, now and then, while operative. "This woman," Moncrieffe

concluded, as he now watched her, "is strenuous without being in the least profound. A fervid motive might grasp and sway her, and she would give to the carrying out of it far more vehement momentum than if she were spiritually sensitive to its moral lights and shades, or even to its claims in the minor consideration of good taste or bad."

Here he was unconsciously right. In a little while the messenger to the village arrived with the prescription, and the small assemblage in the drawing-room was necessarily broken up. The Cassilises were driven away from Greendingle in their superfine open carriage, with two liveried men on the box, and a pair of modish-trapped bays that told in equal terms of good blood and good grooming.

"I wonder what you do or say to that Blagdon girl," began Mrs. Cassilis, with her voice hard as iron, "that makes her so vulgarly rude to me whenever you and I meet her together."

Pinckney Cassilis looked down at the big curved handle of his cane, which he held between his legs at an indolent, toppling slant. He was dressed in the height of fashion; you might have called him a kind of curled darling, with his speckless linen, his symmetric necktie, his almost effulgent boots. But he was the sort of darling muscular and manful enough in frame and face to stand a fair amount of curling without the faintest effeminate results. Past doubt he was a superb physical specimen of the human male animal,

clean of jowl, classic in the cut of every feature, dowered with a crop of short gold ringlets, woman-handed, woman-footed, yet with the chest and limbs of an athlete. About five years ago he had been a penniless young idler, too stupid (as a witty foe once said of him) even to possess a vice. Society had taken him up, though he had scarcely money enough to return its patronage by appearing there clad in a decent evening coat. Mammas disapproved him as a troublesome, dangerous young Adonis. But the daughters of mammas took him out in the cotilion and drifted into ball-room corners with him quite irrepressibly, and murmured of him at their maidenly gatherings. "Isn't it too bad he's so dreadfully poor?" Some of those on whom his great, soft, gray, unintelligent eyes had not beamed at all admiringly, would add, "And then, you know, he's a perfect nobody." For a season or so he remained merely what is called a "dancing man." The exclusives did not ask him to their dinners or their smaller "affairs"; he was regarded in the light of what some one called the decorative ineligible. If he had been even fairly clever he might have pushed his way, and got a little into the inner circles. But he made no effort to exploit the splendid endowment of beauty which fate had bequeathed him. In almost any other society except the sordidly plutocratic one of New York, he would have found himself petted and even lionized for his extraordinary looks. In Paris he would have been an idol of married women, twirled

his mustache up at the ends, worn a beard with an acute point, or perhaps two of them, and sighed sentimentalism through fumes of cigarette-smoke. In London he would have been petted by many charming and possibly distinguished women, have lounged and loitered in the pleasaunces of Upper Bohemia, and perhaps have sauntered, now and then, among gardens where hedges and shrubs had been clean-clipped by aristocracy's most trenchant shears. In New York he was a tolerated dangler and pensioner, and nothing more. Crumbs fell to him from the tables of the potentates—crumbs in the way of benevolent condescension—which he ate with obeisant gusto. But one day there came a great change in his fortunes and prospects. A *débutante* named Caroline Opdyke, who was also a conspicuous heiress, fell in love with him, and made it plain to him that she would take his name for the asking. She was a very handsome girl, whose father, a railway magnate, had railroaded her, as they said, into society. Not merely handsome, she was also presentable, despite nebulous Western antecedents. Like Elma Blagdon, she had had a term of foreign training; in these days of easy international transit what millionaire's daughter fails to secure this educational boon?

With Caroline Opdyke it had swiftly become, as the French say, "to take or to leave." She left a score or so of other suitors and took Pinckney Cassilis. It was brutally declared that the young lady instructed him to offer himself to

her, and that he did so with grateful expedition. True or not, this report gained wide credence. Somebody sneered, "The girl is throwing herself away on a pauper." Somebody else lit the harsh edges of the sneer with humor by replying: "It's of no consequence; she will be rich enough to gratify the most expensive tastes."

Very rich the sudden death of her father soon made her, and while yet in deep mourning she was quietly married to the beautiful young man of her choice. Pinckney Cassilis became the center of an ardent male envy, cloaked in congratulation. He believed himself a phenomenally lucky fellow, and declared so with an innocence that challenged covert ridicule. But later he may have changed this estimate of his own peculiar career. In the opinion of many worldly critics he might have found copious excuse for disappointment. It was expected of the young couple that after their return from a six-months' residence in Europe they would take a "leading" social place. It is always thus expected in New York of people who have been fashionably accepted and who have come into a large lot of money. Leading means feeding, in various dainty and lavish ways. No one can lead who cannot feed, and to feed satisfactorily the expenditure of at least seventy thousand a year is looked for. Otherwise, as the metropolitan phrase runs, "you must take a back seat." To the astonishment and disgust of the "Four Hundred," Mr. and Mrs. Cassilis took a back seat. It was so far back, indeed, that for

a whole season they were scarcely at all discernible. Then they further offended everybody by purchasing an estate in the country and living there nearly all the time. Their "country" was Riverview, suburban, if one pleased, but still distinctly rural. And in a little more time the cause of this retirement began to be gossiped about. Caroline Cassilis was so morbidly jealous of her handsome husband that to have any other woman beam upon him, however harmlessly, cost her pangs of the keenest disrelish.

At first this discovery begot all conceivable phases of raillery and scoff. Then absence from town caused the pair to be at least partially forgotten. But at Riverview Mrs. Cassilis, on her own side, arranged that she should be very distinctly borne in mind. Even the maids and serving-men grinned at her grotesque jealousy. But this was not all. If her husband had been some triumphant fortune-hunter she might have turned him, soon after the honeymoon, half mad with chagrin. Every hour, every minute in the day, her conduct would have reminded him that she held the purse-strings and she alone. She was extremely fond of horses and of driving them; all orders at the stables came solely from herself. She inspected the harness with an eye toward its proper polishing, saw that the stalls were kept in a state of neatness, not only knew every whip from the other, but its precise place of deposit as well; and in respect to the purchase, location and tendance of the carriages held her-

self arbiter supreme. In all domestic affairs a monarchy quite as unlimited was affirmed. "I am master and mistress in one," might have been stamped as a motto on her silver, below the Cassilis crest which she had either created or disinterred.

But poor Pinckney Cassilis had let himself be married with no exorbitant hopes of ruling the household roast. It might have been said that far from showing himself a fortune-hunter he had allowed a fortune to hunt *him*—and run him effectually to earth. Still, his disappointment was by no means moderate. To some observers he represented an incarnate punishment. "This is what a man may get through marrying for money," they declared, though not in these words, or sometimes not in any words at all, but merely by the implication of their tacit disdain: "a gilded and unsexing slavery, a marital degradation worse than that of some rag-picker, who at least holds his own as a husband, though his province of matrimonial dignity be bounded by an attic or a cellar."

Pinckney Cassilis would hardly have understood any such species of fulminating eloquence. But a wise writer has said that nearly all yoked creatures have their private opinions. He was a yoked creature, and he presumably had his; and now, as the dapper Cassilis carriage bowled along through the sweet, idyllic midsummer twilight, he gave his wife an answer so unwontedly self-assertive that she at once sniffed in it the signs of smoldering rebellion.

"Elma Blagdon's a very nice girl, though her manners *are* a bit frisky and skylarking. She only talks that way to tease you, Carrie, and she'd shut right down if you didn't show you *were* teased. But, bless my soul! a child could set you on fire with jealousy; and you've got about as much cause for it with her or anybody else as if we'd just celebrated our diamond wedding."

To almost any other woman this faintly fretful outburst from a spouse of such protracted forbearance would have caused no serious dismay. But with Caroline Cassilis it was different. She straightened herself on the cushioned seat of her comfortable carriage and looked at her husband with suspicious alarm.

VI.

THIS was the first time he had ever accused her of jealousy, and she was ridiculously jealous enough to feel in the fact something significant and portentous. As a wife she had begun fatally wrong. She had been in love with him, and was in love with him still. But in marrying him her world had taught her to fear that she was merely buying him and nothing more. This thought had been like a poisoning worm amid the rose-bower of maidenly sentiment. After marriage she found herself guarding her money and playing with all her possessions the

proprietary martinet, not from really avaricious or tyrannic motives, but because she could never make up her mind that it would have been possible to win the man of her choice if she had been poor like himself. The picture that she presented of a woman who had striven to purchase happiness and found it unpurchasable through retaliatory causes lodged within her own spirit, was one which brimmed with pathos, notwithstanding that comic light in which many gazers heedlessly viewed it from day to day. But indeed if the only humor in the world were of a sort that had no sorrowful side to it, our planet would be a far drearier dwelling-place than now.

Mrs. Cassilis answered her husband with a frosty frown. "Whatever your faults may be, Pinckney, I didn't suppose that silly conceit was one of them. My jealousy, as you call it, is merely a very natural pique. I only wish you were a little more jealous on your own side—I mean of my dignity as your wife."

"Upon my word, Caroline," he returned, with conciliating zeal, "it doesn't strike me that your dignity is ever in the least danger. You know how to take care of it, my dear, at all times, exceptionally well."

"Oh, if that's meant for sarcasm—" she bridled.

"But it isn't," he suavely contradicted. "You *do* hold your own, always and everywhere. If a person like Elma Blagdon tries to make you appear as though you didn't hold it,

her failure should be all the more a feather in your cap."

"He's throwing dust in my eyes," she thought, with the piteous and mute hysteria of an hallucination passionately fixed. "In their talks together *she* has persuaded him that I'm jealous. He would never have hit on that idea of his own accord. He never had the least *flair* of it formerly."

Aloud, she said, with an odd, smiling grimace:

"The girl bounces, at times, beyond all decent bounds of breeding. Just before we left, you no doubt heard her literally *ask* me if she couldn't dine with us."

"And you named next Thursday."

"Yes," replied his wife, a little vaguely. He started at something peculiar in her inflection, and the next minute she went on, with her accustomed clean-clipped decision of tone: "And I shall make a little social affair of it. I found time to ask the new doctor, and he accepted. I had also found time to discover that he's extremely good form. Then we'll have one or two more people—a harmony, you know, of Jacks and Jills. We've not done much dinner-giving lately, and I dare say you'll be quite pleased at the plan if you're put next to that obstreperous Elma."

Pinckney Cassilis crushed a sigh beneath his blond mustache. He knew very well that he would be "put" as far away from Elma Blagdon as the limited circumference of their din-

ing-table would permit. He did not care a dime for the prospective separation. But it irked and stung him to think that his wife should go on like this, burlesquing all that was sacred in her own love for him—a love which he admired and even held in a kind of awe. If he had it perpetually on his conscience that the love was not responded to in kind, then this may have been his reason for not precipitating a crucial conjugal “scene,” in which candor would at length meet candor, hers as nude as his, and both like wrestlers stripped for fight. It would have been a fight from which permanent peace might have sprung, provided Pinckney Cassilis had felt himself empowered to wage it. But did he so feel? Was there not in his soul a silent terror of that ransacking arraignment which might front him, and to which the easy-going, comfortable semi-indifference of his perfectly faithful yet perfectly fireless allegiance might present new and embroiling contrast? His remarkable beauty was not the accompaniment of any remarkable mental strength; but he had the distinct comprehension that reticence and submission were the more politic course where one passionless life has joined itself to the passion which reigns vigilant and alert in another. And so, on his side as on hers, this “marriage for money” teemed with melancholy satire. Tyranny, on the one hand, that inevitably hated itself for being so; slavery, on the other hand, that feared to seek its freedom—these were the conditions that retroact-

ively were destined to work upon other existences in the chronicle here unfolded.

Moncrieffe's was one of the latter, though he little dreamed that in asking him to dine with her on the following Thursday, Caroline Cassilis had a design and a desire to plant a spark of attraction for him in the capricious bosom of Elma Blagdon. He staid for over an hour at Greendingle that night after the guests had gone. Mrs. Thirlwall's placid sleep still continued, and he finally thought it best to leave the prescription in Eloise's hands, after it had been brought, bottled and labeled, from the village, with clear instructions as to just how it should be administered in case the small hours of the night should visit her aunt with restless ills.

A civil, if taciturn, groom drove him homeward through the mild starlight. He left with a sense of very sweet and grateful farewell from Eloise and of neutral urbanity from Dunstan.

"You're in luck, Basil," said Whitewright, when they had met and "talked things over." His eyes twinkled with fun. "In a few weeks, I suppose, every pretty woman at Riverview will be playing invalid."

"The more the merrier—for my bank account," laughed Moncrieffe. His voice grew serious as he referred, now for a second time, to Eloise's burst of emotion. "She must have meant, of course, but one thing."

"Oh, beyond doubt, yes—her illegitimacy.

She's the dearest of dear girls. We've known each other since children. Only a few days ago she came into my shop, and gave a start on seeing me."

"You were unexpected."

"My *appearance* was; I'd changed so for the worse."

"You persist in saying that."

"Only when it says itself, my boy. I don't shirk it; that's all."

"But you seem almost fond, Magnus, of the idea that you're—"

"Doomed?" he smiled. "I'm not in the least distressed by it."

"Pshaw! we're all doomed, for that matter."

"True enough, Basil; and between our 'sooner' and 'later' there's only the difference of a yesterday and a to-morrow. We're all in a sinking ship. Some of us have a firm faith in the life-boats; others think there's only a slim chance of salvation from them; and others are resigned to being lulled tranquilly asleep in the great oblivious ocean."

"You're among the last-named company, I surmise. With all the gentle arrogance of an agnostic, you probably divide the passengers into 'first-cabin' rationalists, 'intermediate' trimmers, and 'steerage' pietists."

"I'm not so arbitrary," sparkled Whitewright, relishing the metaphor.

"Still, that 'great oblivious ocean' appeals to you as a very comfortable *nirvana*. You don't expect of it any subaqueous goal of refuge."

"Oh, no; sea-kings and mermaids have been scientifically abolished."

"I see—like angels and other celestial appurtenances," Moncrieffe mused aloud. "It's extraordinary," he went on, with more enlivened manner, "how this age of doubt brings comfort to one mind and distress to another. All your magnificent fatalism, my dear Magnus, is born of your conviction that the old forms of faith are fallacious and that man, having received no divine revelation as to his immortality after death, may sensibly rate himself among all the other destructible products of nature. But there, on the other hand, is Mrs. Thirlwall, who believes (or disbelieves) very much along your lines, and yet derives from her convictions, I should say, very little else than the acutest misery."

"I've been greatly interested," said White-wright, "in what you told me that she confessed to you on this particular point. I can understand her feelings so well," he pursued, while his black eyes brightened self-searchingly. "I had the same revolt and reluctance, once. I was pierced by a sense of tragedy in my own case. For a while I was weakened, even terrified by it. Then relief came; it was the relief of self-effacement."

Moncrieffe made a gesture of dissent. "Ah, that is just what many another would find so unrelieving! Grant that man is only a very minor part of creation. Go further, and say that *the earth*, with its millions of living shapes, is

of no more relative consequence than a piece of cheese swarming with maggots. Very well; as a maggot endowed with intelligence and imagination I should persist in hoping—”

“Ah, hoping, yes,” cried Whitewright, as merrily as though the talk had turned on some subject replete with cheerfulness. “Hope, however, is temperamental. It is all the religion that some people possess; I dare say that in combination with charity it is really the only religion Eloise Thirlwall possesses. But with resignation it has nothing to do.” The mirthful light faded from his face and left there a pensive afterglow. “Resignation is the child of disappointment—always. And disappointment is better than hope.”

“Magnus!”

“I mean it. Hope is a bird that always flutters and struggles when it flies; it has no security; it never hangs poised and motionless in mid-air, like the Theban eagle. The people who hope for things to happen are forever doubting if they will. Those who have made a permanent truce with disappointment neither expect nor desire; they accept what arrives, without gratitude and without irritation.”

Moncrieffe had long ago ceased to marvel at the oddly joyous pessimism of his friend. It had once struck him as almost uncanny in its tenets, but of late he had grown to evolve a curious and apt harmony from its relation to Whitewright's precarious tenure of health. In almost any other man he would have denounced the

whole mood of mind as an attitude, a pose; but in this instance, and at this late day of their acquaintanceship, to have done so would have seemed like an act of wanton irreverence. If Whitewright reaped consolation from the inconsolable he at least gathered his harvest with the most unaffected and legitimate sort of husbandry.

"You spoke of Eloise Thirlwall's hope being her probable religion," Moncrieffe now said, turning their stream of talk from a channel which friendly fondness made at no time attractive to him. "With such native buoyancy she should look forward to the shielding and aidful chances of marriage. But I judge she is a girl who would never marry otherwise than from motives of the heart, no matter how much the dread of her aunt's death might urge her to the contrary."

"Right, Basil. . . . Is she the sort of girl *you* could fancy yourself falling in love with?"

"She's the sort of girl almost any man could fancy himself falling in love with," was the evasive answer. "I've lost my heart elsewhere, though," he added, with light abruptness.

"You mean—?"

"To her sweet elderly aunt, Mrs. Thirlwall."

"And you believe her malady past real relief?"

"Relief? No. Cure? That's another affair. I want to make a very close and severe examination to-morrow. The subject, as you know, is one that I've given marked attention to. It

would overjoy me, Magnus, to find that some functional disturbance was at the root of her attacks instead of the organic lesion they've assured her she's afflicted with."

On the morrow Moncrieffe found his patient up and about. She told him that she had passed a wondrously restful and invigorating night, and her good tidings were brightly reflected in the eyes of her niece. Dunstan had departed at an early hour for Newport, and possibly as a peaceful celebration of this event Anita was behaving in the most tractable manner. When the time came for being separated from her mother, she moved out of the room at her piteous little ambling pace by the side of Margaret, not even casting toward Eloise that martyred look which the beloved cousin had expected.

They had gone to Mrs. Thirlwall's bedroom, by this time, and Eloise now turned with a smile to Moncrieffe and told him that she supposed he would soon want her to follow in Anita's footsteps.

"But oh, if when I return," she went on, "you only have some fine bit of encouraging news for me, doctor, what a blessing I'll consider it!"

"Ah, you may make certain, my dear," said her aunt, "the new verdict will not materially differ from the old one."

And yet here Mrs. Thirlwall proved wrong. Moncrieffe was with her for a good hour, and the scientific search that he made was not only one of great accuracy, but based upon advanced

methods of diagnosis. When at last the exiled Eloise was readmitted into the chamber, she gave a glad little cry on quickly scanning Mrs. Thirlwall's face.

"The new verdict *does* differ from the old one!" she exulted. And then, with her looks dancing toward Moncrieffe: "Oh, I felt *sure* you'd not have so severe a one!"

"You treat me as if I manufactured professional opinions rather than deduced them," said Moncrieffe, dryly.

"I know, I know!" she acceded. "Am I not idiotic?" And for a moment she hid her head on her aunt's shoulder.

Mrs. Thirlwall stroked her chestnut hair. "I'm afraid, my dear, that you will not find the verdict so remarkably merciful, after all," she said.

"It's this," broke in Moncrieffe, gently laconic, with his gaze full on Eloise's lifting face. "Your aunt can live on in fair health for years yet, by keeping her days quiet days, unworried, unexcited."

"And that is so hard to do in this particular planet," sighed Mrs. Thirlwall, with the sort of under-smile that accompanied nearly all her words. "Why don't you doctors have asteroids to which you can send your patients? That would be the right 'change of air' for them—an entire escape from earth and her indigenous troubles."

"It might be going further and faring worse," said Moncrieffe. "Who knows that outrageous

fortune doesn't rear its crest quite as high on Saturn and Venus?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Thirlwall; "and they've probably each a Shakespeare to call it poetic names."

"But you haven't finished your verdict, doctor," reminded Eloise.

"I find," Moncrieffe resumed, "no trace of valvular disease. I can see why it was inferred, however." He then spoke on, quite at length and with much fluency though not a hint either of undue self-assertion or medical pedantry. "Finally," he affirmed, "I reach what seems to me a logical conclusion. The organ may be appreciably strengthened by treatment, and a slight yet serious tendency to paralysis retarded if never actually cured. But as I have told your aunt, Miss Thirlwall, she should consent to a certain prescribed regimen—"

"Oh, I'll *make* her consent!" interjected Eloise ardently. "Even if it's bread and water, doctor, I'll promise you that her shrieks of hunger will find me savagely callous!"

The morning was breezy and sunny, and the lawns of Greendingle were a living loveliness of shade and shine as Moncrieffe and Eloise came out on the piazza together. They had left Mrs. Thirlwall upstairs, and her niece was declaring with earnest emphasis that she would prove the most watchful of nurses. But suddenly her tones faltered a little, and she broke away from her protestations by rather insecurely murmuring:

"Oh, doctor, you must have thought me almost demented yesterday! Did you not?"

"Naturally you had been a good deal upset."

She nodded quickly. "Aunt Emily is my mainstay—my refuge—apart from the great personal love I feel for her." Here the girl's face hardened, though not in the least austere. "I suppose you know *what I am*. You must know, by this time, even if you hadn't heard before. I feel as if a kind of searching white light were thrown on me all the while, in this gossiping, provincial place. It isn't mere egotism, and it isn't morbid fret. It's just a consciousness of the harsh and heartless truth."

"Have you found it so harsh and heartless, then?" he said. This questioning answer seemed to him a happier and kindlier way of telling her that he *had* learned what she thus frankly assumed him to have learned.

She pressed her lips together with a momentary effect of pain. "You *do* know, then! I *thought* so. . . If anything befell poor Aunt Emily I would be absolutely homeless and helpless. Dunstan Thirlwall would probably at once separate me from Anita. He would, I fear, place her in some asylum, some 'home.' All this land would go to him. Aunt Emily has nothing but a life-interest in it, and the whole family income is derived from it. He would advise me to get a place as governess, or nursery-maid, or something of that sort. He is perfectly inflexible—and besides, I am quite as much so in my way. I would never beg his clemency, and even if he

offered me any, feeling toward me in the hostile, intolerant spirit that he does, I would gather up defiant bravery enough to answer him in very independent terms."

Moncrieffe scarcely knew what response to frame. Standing here in the cool, shaded doorway, he heard the jocund trebles of birds ringing from knoll and copse. The sun, transiently muffled in a cloud whose flocculence it drenched with pearly light, blackened by this fleeting retirement the tracts of delicious shadow on the short-shorn verdure of the aftermath. Such brief and delicate eclipses make the tenderest poetry of a midsummer day, turning the disc of the roadside daisy more saliently white and luring from arches of distant horizons a new azure sparkle, a new descendant grace.

As he looked steadily into the sincere and womanly face of this girl who had just addressed him with so sorrowful a candor, it seemed as if he had known her for months rather than hours. He felt his heart pulsate toward her with a strange and vital fervor. Her untrammelled recital of personalities no longer partook of the least extraordinary tinge. He realized that in the loneliness and isolation of her dread this longing for human sympathy had wakened an irresistible impulse of confidence.

He put forth his hand and let it rest upon her own. She started a little, but did not resist the pressure of his fingers, large, virile and smooth. She looked into his eyes and read there, no doubt, both his admiration and his pity.

"It's a bitter fate," he said, low of voice. "But you must not despair. I know you will not, for I read in your face that you are not of the despairing kind. . . Do I not surmise even more than that?" he went softly on.

"What?" she breathed, with a vaguely alarmed glance at him, withdrawing her hand.

VII.

"ONLY this," he said, with the faintest of reassuring laughs, pleased more than he knew by the maidenly dignity of her sudden little sensitive flurry. "You've somehow grown rather deeply to trust (am I not right?) my possible power to perpetuate your aunt's threatened life?"

"Yes—you're right. I *have* grown to trust you like that!"

"And if her life were prolonged—say for five, six, eight years? Would that change your future prospects? Would it take from you the sort of terror that now hangs over all your to-morrows?"

"The loss would still be severe—the terror, as you name it, might by then have vanished. Aunt is ~~land~~-poor now; but if the railroad people who ~~talk~~ of buying up acres of her property should decide on such purchase, her income would be ten times what it now is, and from that income (she could not touch the principal, of course) I am certain that a generous provision would be made for me. It would not be a for-

tune, but it would be a challenge to actual want."

"I understand." As he spoke he remembered certain words of Dunstan's on the previous evening. "And this purchase would involve the destruction of a graveyard, would it not?"

"Have you heard of that?" she said, quickly and with some surprise. "Yes; but that is an affair which does not concern *us*. We have no right or title to *that* piece of property. The village authorities would, I believe, cede part of the graveyard. They have already shown their willingness to do so. I don't think it has been decided how much they will cede. But desecrating even the oldest graves in that way," she added, with a faint shudder, "seems to me so horrible! Does it not seem so to you?"

Moncrieffe asked himself, when he had jumped into his waiting wagon and driven away, why he had chosen at all to touch upon that irrelevant theme of the graveyard's possible violation. He concluded that his having done so had sprung from a desire to witness in Eloise's face and manner just the little humane and tender avowal which she had confirmed his expectation of her by sweetly revealing.

After two or three fresh meetings he began to feel that they had grown really intimate. Having a good deal more leisure than he desired, lingering little chats with Eloise would strike him as a very pleasant way to employ it.

"Your aunt is doing splendidly," he said, one morning. "I don't believe her heart has been

as strong and regular in its beatings for five or six years."

"And it's all just because of your treatment?" she said, in tones that he somehow found tantalizingly nondescript.

"There's honorable recognition!" he pretended to grumble. "Oh, no; I had better be truthful and admit that the former treatment of old Dr. Bascomb is now telling upon her system."

The girl laughed at his irony. "And is the course you have taken with Aunt Emily quite scientifically new?"

"Certain doctors would call it so. But we younger ones think nothing new that was not discovered yesterday."

"And science is always being blessed with a fruitful yesterday?"

"It would almost seem as if she truly were."

"Her progress has been so mighty, of late, has it not? No wonder that even so warm and wide-sighted a spirit as Aunt Emily's has been caught in the cold, glittering snare of its denials and doubts."

"You call them a snare, then?" he quickly asked.

"Not in contempt. But I am a believer, you know." She said this with a defiant demureness that put twinkles into his eyes.

"You speak as if I did *not* know, and were going to give you a violent scolding for being one. That shows what a queer infidel age we're living in."

"Oh, people may be as ardent infidels as they

please," she said, with a seriousness that wore a sheath of lightness; "but I shall always keep my faith, for what seems to me a momentous reason."

"Reason and faith are generally supposed to be the two poles," he answered.

"Yes. But I don't believe blindly," she protested. "I can't think that I do. We human creatures are finite, and nature is infinite—or at least is relatively so to *us*. What is the consequence? A mystery. That mystery I call God, and I endow it with every loving and protective quality. When they ask me what love and protection I see in certain dreadful ills that occur to us all, I answer that there couldn't be any mystery if I did see. And I think I'm proof even against the logicians, in this posture, for if I've started with the idea of God being a mystery to us mortals, why isn't it sound sense enough to assume that He should accomplish all His good in ways whose workings are shadowy and occult?"

Her words vibrated with conviction and sincerity, yet they carried no self-secure positiveness. They even had a timid ring, as though underswept by misgiving that they might too roughly collide with opposite views and conclusions in her hearer.

Moncrieffe felt the delightful spell of her eagerness in waiting for his reply before it came; and perhaps he delayed it a little that he might better enjoy the richly human picture of her creased brows, interrogative eyes and parted lips.

"You make your veneration a sort of blankly receptive vagueness," he said, "and then you paint upon it all kinds of charming pictorial hopes. I don't see why the attitude isn't a very comfortable one, if it can only be preserved."

"Preserved?" she echoed. "You mean that I'm young and that bitter coming experiences may destroy it. But you forget that I have suffered—perhaps more than most girls of my age and surroundings."

"Yes," he replied, "you have surely suffered. I grant that."

"And it has never changed me!" she hurried. "No, nor would any future suffering change me! I am confident of a living God whose other name is love! I shall be confident of it till I die, even if I die in misery both of mind and body!"

"I see," he said, shortly yet not coldly. "That is what we call temperament."

"Yes. It is my temperament to believe—to take the Divine Message for granted, no matter how obscurely it may be conveyed. . . And you," she broke off, with the new personal query giving to her manner a faint, wistful disarray. "Are you quite at odds with me in my optimism?"

"I'm at odds with life, I think," he said.

"With life? Oh, everybody who thinks at all is that."

"But there are varying shades of antagonism. I suspect that mine is gloomier than yours."

"Gloomier? Misanthropically?"

"Oh, no. It's a shallow hate, that hate of

one's fellows. Between one's self and them there should be only a give-and-take of pity."

"Then you meant—?" she said, very interestedly.

"That there's so much we can't do here and can't be here, in spite of our best efforts." He spoke on, for quite a while, of his friend, Magnus Whitewright, while the sympathetic changes in her watchful face gave him a poetic fancy of how summer winds will crisp or darken the silky tide of a woodland pool. "But poor Magnus," he at length broke off, "is handicapped in a physical way. Destiny pushes him to the wall with a kind of insolent brutality. Its assaults are often far subtler than that. The element of so-called chance comes in, and picks off some of your best energies like the rifle-balls of an ambuscaded guerilla. For my own part, I feel this vigilant menace more keenly the longer that I live. A man wants to do something, to become something, before he dies—to fulfill himself spiritually, morally, even mundanely. There are so many little imps of calamity that lurk along the roadside of his career, ready to wreak their maiming spite upon him. We applaud success in the world. Do we ever realize how mere luck, in such cases, has been able, as Shakespeare pithily put it, to 'shackle accident'? I confess," he ended, with a deprecating smile, "that my emotions in this regard have been more of a presentiment than a heart-burning."

"Then why borrow trouble?" she asked, with a sudden practical turn that plucked from him a

broad, amused smile. "As long as your road is smooth, why anticipate in it ruts and hillocks?"

"Sensible counsel," he approved, but so unspontaneously that she struck in, with almost frowning reprimand:

"It's not for a man of your native force to weaken it by imagining the attacks of foes who haven't yet given a single hostile sign."

"Ah, well and good," he granted, flattered by her pleasant touch of fierceness. "But if one feels the foes are there, torpid unconcern of them is a hard mood to cultivate. . ."

Still, he reflected afterward how wholesome was her opposition to his disbelief in the freedom of the human will to hew for itself a secure and unperilous pathway. He loved this new association with the intrinsic sturdiness and good-cheer of her character. It was a relief to be himself with her, even though a certain friendly wrangling would sometimes bemist if not cloud the air of their intercourse. With poor White-wright he had always preserved a kind of mental masquerade, and had never more than faintly averred his own solemn inward surety that to every living man there was vouchsafed just so much opportunity, and no more, of exploiting his honorable ambitions, outside of a tyrannic, impalpable, insidious agency, a veritable power of the air, that waited to thwart and defeat him.

And what were Moncrieffe's ambitions? Honorable they surely were, and hence, in their general worldly definition, unselfish. Here and

now, at the outset of his professional life, he desired distinction and wealth. He was ready to work strenuously for both, and he had placed the anticipated winning of neither upon any romantically lofty height. But in so strongly hinting to Eloise Thirlwall that he dreaded the latent enmity of circumstance, he had expressed a half-slumbering alarm which through all his recent years of early manhood had slowly strengthened within his thought. He had so far philosophized his own daily existence as to see with what random turmoil the slings and arrows that forever wound us come pattering about our ears. Once, in a state of nervous dismay (perhaps largely wrought by Whitewright's untoward collapse), he had even said to himself that for any man to try and wring out of life a moderate amount of profit and victory, was a risk not only parallel with that of the soldier on the ordinary battlefield, but with that of the soldier in a hot bullet-raining siege. "Thousands are falling every day," he mused, "and the pathos of it is that their bravery counts no better than if it were cowardice. Matthew Arnold spoke of some power not ourselves that makes for righteousness. He might also have assumed there's a power not ourselves that makes for disaster."

Moncrieffe's little talks with Eloise caused him to wonder if the near-coming dinner of Mrs. Cassilis would give him anything so diverting and stimulant. He had sharp doubts on this point, and told Whitewright, one morning, that he fancied he had been brought quite abruptly

within the fragrance of the fine flower of intellectual Riverview society.

"As if there *were* any intellectual Riverview society!" scoffed Whitewright. "It's a collection of rather lazy and dull plutocrats. Of course I'm supposed to know nothing about it—I, the son of a poor village apothecary. But father, who had the self-education that is peculiarly American, proved a very shrewd looker-on in Vienna. His observations were a part of my youthful impressions, and I've never had the least reason for reversing their testimony."

"You might have now, if you'd practically try, Magnus."

"I?" He laughed, and the laugh ended in a little hacking cough which Moncrieffe hated; it kept intruding such a gloomy omen into his hope of his friend's bettered health. "They'd no more allow *me* to put my feet under their patrician mahoganies than if I were one of their lackeys. It *might* have been different, with my college training and all that, if I hadn't gone into the old paternal little retail shop. But *now*, my boy! Why, it's a question whether the mere fact of our living together may not—"

"Hush, Magnus!" cried Moncrieffe. "If I thought such a thing I'd write to those Cassilises declining their dinner, without even the mendacious politeness of inventing a sore throat or a touch of rheumatism."

Whitewright looked at him with a kind of gay ferocity. "You'd do nothing of the sort, Basil. I'd never hear of it for a second." Then his

faded face became all an eager fondness. "I'm selfish about your success, my boy; I shall reap a vicarious triumph from it." He put his head on one side, in an access of that incongruous pleasantry which clung so often about his references to death, yet somehow never with the least flippant import. "If you allow me to shuffle off this mortal coil without a full conviction that you're on the highroad to an excellent practice, I shall die penetrated with the intention of making to you on the subject all sorts of blood-curdling *post-mortem* inquiries."

"Please hush, Magnus," pleaded his friend. "Even in jest—"

"Bah, Basil, it isn't in jest at all. It's in dead—or, I should say, dying—earnest. . . As for your marriage, ah, what a pity such a dear girl as Eloise Thirlwall couldn't be magically translated into the environments of Elma Blagdon, and she put with a like convenient necromancy into the latter's place!"

Moncrieffe first showed amazement, and then shrugged it away, with an indulgent yawn.

"Why don't you talk," he said; a little sullenly, "of my marrying the Bartholdi Statue?"

"She wouldn't be at all a good match," bantered Whitewright. "She has a fine, commanding position, I grant, but her parentage is foreign, and I insist on the future Mrs. Moncrieffe being a native-born American." Then, while they interchanged a laugh at the quaintness of this nonsense, he went on, with altered tones:

"Poor Eloise Thirlwall, for that matter, has no parentage at all."

Moncrieffe felt himself flush. "If there *were* any question of matrimony," he broke out, "I'd despise myself for remembering it of her!"

Whitewright started at his fervor. "God bless you, Basil, of course you would! You're one of the few men who'd be manly enough to forget it!"

VIII.

THOUGH Moncrieffe had his doubts concerning just what degree of enjoyment he should gain from Mrs. Cassilis's coming dinner, to Elma Blagdon the prospect of appearing there was pleasant in the extreme.

"I think," she ruminated aloud, in her father's presence, one morning, "that I'll wear my light-green gown with the big puffed sleeves, and my collar of pearls. Those ought to make me look as smart as about anything else I could get myself up in."

"And 'fore an hour, El, you'll have changed your mind," said Mr. Blagdon.

"Well," she pouted, "suppose I do. There's such a lot of new gowns that I haven't worn this summer."

"You wouldn't go anywheres, El. I been ready ever since June, but you've kept putting

me off. *I was for Saratoga and the Lakes and the Thousand Islans, winding up at Nooport."*

"Newport," said Elma, with a mock sigh and a theatric rolling glance toward him. "*You at Newport, papa!*"

"Do you mean I ain't fit to be seen there?" said the old man, reddening.

She slipped to his side and began to smooth with both hands his whitish, glistening hair. "Oh, no, dear. But you'd hate it, and you wouldn't know a soul, and all that. Some of these days we'll take a cottage there for the season. That will be different."

"You'll talk about it, El, and that's all you *will* do. It don't seem right a girl o' your looks and brains should poke off in one place forever."

"I'm sure this is a very nice place," said Elma, letting one hand rest on his shoulder as she turned and looked through the low, broad window. Terraces that were ablaze with bloom sloped majestically down to dark-green masses of trees. Beyond swept the Hudson, magnificent in its morning scintillancē, with that steadfast effect of march, of progress, which all great rivers convey. The house itself was a stately affair in stone, with more turrets and general castellation than some critics thought tasteful for its size, though indeed it was very large when one considered that only two people, apart from the servants, occupied its roomy interior.

"Oh, it's nice enough," said Elma's father, with sudden stout boastfulness. "I guess there ain't a house in Riverview that beats it, by and

large. It cost me pretty near six hundred thousand to build, and it costs me, to keep it up, pretty near—”

“That will do, papa.”

He instantly paid deference to the brisk command, which he would perhaps have either disregarded or resented from the lips of any other living mortal.

“But it’s hot here, it’s awful hot all through the summer,” he went on, with a meekness the more surprising because at once so prompt and so conciliatory. “I never reckoned on the heat o’ the Hudson till I’d got settled right ’longside of it like this. It ain’t any place to stay at through July and August. I s’pose I wouldn’t feel the heat so, El, if I had my business to ’tend to. But you’ve made me give all that the grand bounce, and here I am, nosing about, with nothing on earth to do.”

“Never mind; we’ll rent a house in town next October—or buy one.”

“That’s what you said last summer, El,” he almost whimpered. “But when the time come you stuck here straight on till January, and then I had just to *drag* you to Floridy.”

Elma was looking steadily down at the radiant river, bastioned at its further bank by the long clean-cut cliff of the Palisades, above whose gray-green glimmer floated a few delicate clouds, in their lazy, rounded gauze.

“You’ve lots to occupy you, papa,” she said, absently. “You’ve the gardens and stables and—”

"Oh, let up on *them*, El. I pay first-class prices for first-class hands, and everything goes on as if it didn't want me and would kind o' snub me for interfering in it. The overseers don't need to be overseen, and all I've got to do is to draw checks. That might be exciting exercise if there wasn't so much ready cash always waiting to draw 'em on. But just signing your name to 'em and running over accounts once a week—why, it's reg'lar baby-play to an old business chap like me. Still, you *would* have me quit selling my medicines, and now I ain't got a thing to keep my mind occupied. I get through the morning papers 'fore you're out o' your bed, for I never *could* sleep later than ha'-past seven; and you know how little I care for carriage-riding; and you won't let me have a fast trotter and a light wagon, like I used to have in the city, when your mother was alive and you was a tot of a girl, and—"

Elma turned from the window, now, and moved to a piano which stood open scarcely a yard from her father's elbow. She seated herself before it, and sent forth from its keys a facile flow of notes. She seemed to be timing her words to them as she said:

"You told me, weeks ago, that you'd read up on English history. You confessed to me that you didn't know William the Conqueror from William of Orange, or Queen Elizabeth from Queen Anne. I've had a really splendid library collected and brought here—not many rare editions, but a great many good and valuable ones

—and the room itself, as everybody who's seen it admits, is a perfect dream of beauty and comfort. But though you promised me you'd read there at least two hours a day, I doubt if you've entered the room for a week."

"It hurts my eyes to read anything but the papers, El. Besides, I can't remember what I *do* read. I'm somehow too old to tackle the kings and queens o' England. I get 'em so mixed up that there ain't any use trying to keep their politics and their marriages and their births and their deaths and their battles and their general goings-on sep'rated one from t'other."

Elma continued playing, with a short, exasperated toss of her head, and presently Mr. Blagdon resumed:

"I'd take a heap o' pleasure hearing you at the pianner if you'll only play a real *tune*. But half the time you don't; you just make it up out o' your head like that, and there ain't a bit o' fun in it at all."

"Make it up out of my head!" smiled Elma. "Oh, papa, what I've just strummed so badly is by a composer named Schumann, one of the truest geniuses that ever lived!" . .

She suddenly struck two or three sonorous chords, and then dashed into a jingling bit of musical rowdyism from some recent operetta.

"That's it!" exclaimed her father, as he leaned back in his chair with a relishing chuckle. "Splendid! Go on!"

Elma did go on, quite riotously, for several

minutes. Then she began to play something different though equally trashy, in much slower *tempo*, speaking, at the same time, with little measured noddings of the head.

"I'm glad, papa, you can take pleasure in such rubbish. . . And by the way, if Dr. Moncrieffe does, I shall be furious about it."

"Dr. Moncrieffe again, El! I d'clare if you don't behave just dead *gone* about that feller! I don't see what you *saw*. He looked to me like a nice, plain young man, with nothing to him anyways out o' the common."

"He's just too perfectly adorable for anything," said Elma, still playing. "I can hardly wait for the Cassilises' dinner."

"Oh, that's the way you talk *now*! Pretty soon it'll be a very different story."

"No, it will *not*!"

"There was that young chap at Saratogy. You made me work things round so that I got interdooced to him and then interdooced him to you. But you'd no sooner said ten words to him than you give him the cold shoulder and flounced off, leaving me and him staring at one another on the Clarendon Hotel piazza."

"I remember. He looked quite nice at a distance. But when he was nearer I found that he had untidy nails, and that his ears stuck out too much, and that he talked through his nose, and—oh, I've forgotten what else. He was horrid, and I simply *had* to get away from him."

"I could name others you've gone on about in just the same way, El, and then dropped like hot

potaters. This Dunstan Thirlwall, he 'pears to be treated better than any of 'em for a steady spell o' time."

Elma stopped playing and wheeled round on the piano-stool so that her eyes and her father's directly met.

"I've *done* with Dunstan Thirlwall, papa."

"Oh; you have!"

"Yes. He's *nice*; he's a gentleman in outward form, and all that. I like to talk to him; I like . . ."

"His finger-nails, hey? And the shapes of his ears?"

Elma's brows gloomed, and then a smile flashed from her lips. "Don't be tiresome, now! What I mean is this: Dunstan Thirlwall is the embodiment of everything outwardly cultivated. But he's inwardly cold and almost unhuman. I'll never marry him, and I think he understands it at last. That's why he's gone to Newport. So far as *I'm* concerned he can stay there forever!"

"Ain't he one o' the nabobs, El? Ain't he in the Six Hundred, and all that?"

"You never *will* remember, papa, that it's the *Four* Hundred. Yes, he is. But I don't care. I wouldn't marry him on that account. I'd never marry him on *any*."

"I s'pose he's asked you half a dozen times or so, ain't he?"

"Never mind *how* many times." She abruptly darted from the piano-stool, and made a *preposterous* burlesque curtsey. "What would

you say if I came to you and wanted you to let me marry a poor village doctor, who probably hasn't as many thousands as you have millions?"

"Go along," said her father, flushing with diversion at her "capers," as he would have called them. The instant she gave the faintest hint of mirthful vivacity he was intoxicated with amusement. He thought her the most beautiful, fascinating and graceful girl in the whole world. Passionate paternity was developed in him to a degree that verged upon the most reckless fanaticism, if indeed it did not pass that limit.

"I'd just like to see any poverty-struck, fortune-hunting feller like that," he continued, with his face wrinkled into a sort of painful geniality, "come fooling round *you*. I'd tell him, quick as wink, that he'd better. . ."

But here the words faltered into silence, for there was something in Elma's air that implied displeasure, not to say vexation. And to displease or vex his worshiped child was with Mr. Abijah Blagdon like letting flame lick his flesh. He lived only to propitiate and humor and be governed by her. Utterly her captive, he rejoiced in his slavery. The yoke that was worn so willingly he would not have exchanged for any sovereignty earth might bestow.

Elma perfectly understood this. She was fond of her father, but she had no ardent love for him. Egotism and caprice were the two ruling factors in her nature. She was intelligent, in a way thoughtful, and in a way not educated ill. But to state that indulgence had not spoiled her

would be to state that fire does not burn. Beyond doubt she had her moods of goodness; but these were opposed by selfishness, arrogance, cruelty, and an almost incalculable caprice. One of the chief reasons why she remained so permanently at Riverview was a dread of being treated as less important elsewhere. She knew very well that before she could hold her own socially in any other place, a certain number of preliminary reverences must be paid. This prospect did not at all please her. At Riverview the magnificent mansion and its troops of underlings had done their distinct work; everybody had called long ago; it was a small world but a very dapper and opulent one, nevertheless; being a settled somebody in it was better than struggling frantically forth from nobodyism somewhere else.

But Elma had another reason for biding in this noble home on the Hudson, whose designing and general structure she herself had imperiously chosen and supervised, and to which she had given the name of The Terraces. "I like a sensible, appropriate name," she had declared. "Half the others here are named with a most idiotic sentimentality. We'll show them that we've a dignified disdain for their 'Lawnclyffs' and their 'Locustcrofts' and their 'Cedarwolds.' " Her pride resented the ridicule with which society would be sure to greet the presence of her father. It might be covert ridicule, but they could not conceal it from her detection; its mere *entity* would mean disclosure to her sensitive

surveillance. Here people had got used to him, and she had got used to going about with him. At first he had caused her pangs of acute torment, but now she felt that the worst was over, apart from proudly realizing that her father's very large wealth lifted him into envied eminence, even here amid these close-clustering plutocrats. But out in the big "open" it would be odious enough. Of course she well knew that they would accept herself and her parent most meekly in the end. But she rebelled against any term of probation whatever. It stung her pride to think of waiting in the antechamber of aristocracy till it deigned to receive her elsewhere. She would prefer to that the swift and direct course of a politic marriage.

But for a good while past she had had a sort of premonition that she would be captured by a passion and yield herself to it in an ecstasy of surrender. Her father used to jest at her mutable whims, and tell her she would die a spinster; it seemed to him an immense joke to say that she would die a spinster, she whom he held suited in every way to be the bride of a royal prince, and one not so very far from the throne, either. But Elma had grown to believe that her very fastidiousness was the prelude of a great coming infatuation. She would sometimes feel puzzled by herself, so irreconcilable seemed her susceptibilities and her disapprobations.

The day of the Cassilis dinner was sultry and humid, with grumblings of thunder constantly emanant from a leaden west. Elma had a mor-

bid horror of thunderstorms, and would have written her hostess at the eleventh hour, declining to appear, if it had not been for her longing once more to see Moncrieffe. She adhered to the idea of her green gown and pearls, and looked strikingly well in them. All through the drive to the Cassilises she kept asking her father questions about the storm—whether or no he thought there was any chance of its bursting while they were at dinner, and whether the augmented mutters of thunder might not be a warning for them to turn back and send Mrs. Cassilis an apologetic note.

“Oh, I guess it’ll keep growling like this all night, and never do anything worse,” her father consoled. . . . When she spoke of turning back he broke into a sonorous giggle, and told her that he guessed she wouldn’t miss the chance of meeting her new “fancy” for all the thunderstorms that the weather-prophets could invent.

“If he shouldn’t be there after all,” said Elma, “I believe I’d get up some horrid sudden illness and go right straight home again.”

“You couldn’t,” teased Blagdon, “for the carriage would be gone. You’d have to stay on, El, and eat your dinner without him.”

“I should be furious,” she retorted, as if to herself. “Mrs. Cassilis was particular to say, when she invited us, that the new doctor had agreed to come.” Here she looked petulantly at her father and snapped forth: “Papa, you *know* how I suffer in a thunderstorm, and you might *have better taste* than to try and *increase* my

nervousness. . . No" (as he sought fondlingly to take her hand); "I think you've behaved in the most cruel way!" She tightly folded both hands in her lap, but he leaned his head down and tore them apart with gentle force, covering one of them with kisses. Till they reached the Cassilis residence he kept murmuring all sorts of consolatory things, some of them phrased in the very language that he had used to her years ago when she was a little girl. She sat with her head fallen backward on the cushions of the carriage, making no reply whatever, the large white lids of her large eyes listlessly drooped, and that look which we have already heard called nun-like reigning sedately on her palish, narrowish, pretty face.

When they reached the Cassilis gateways a few large drops of rain were falling. But the drive to the house was not long, and the electric lights which flooded its interior gave it a cheerful look after the sullen dimness outside. They were late as they entered the beautiful white-and-gold drawing-room. Elma was always late whenever she went anywhere in Riverview, and the assembled company, fourteen in all, had made this failing the subject of a rather general comment. She floated into the room to be greeted by a little ripple of amused laughter, her father following somewhat ponderously in her wake. She looked very graceful and distinguished as she crossed the threshold and reached out to Mrs. Cassilis one slender, long-gloved hand. Quick as a flash of the lightning she was

so afraid of, she had observed that Moncrieffe was among the company. This pleased her, and the pleasure showed itself at once in her manner, though she did not deign to give him the faintest glance of welcome.

She deigned, for that matter, to heed nobody present except her hostess, dropping into a chair with a sort of languid impertinence while her father went about, shaking hands here and there in cordial expansiveness. Everybody, however, was looking solely at her. In Riverview at least she was an important person. Some of the neighbors heartily disliked her, but no one ever treated her with inattention.

"I do so hope we're not going to have an awful storm!" she cried. "I'm the most terrible coward about thunder and lightning. Do you know, we were on the point of driving home again? If it's very bad I shall certainly get under the table."

This caused a general laugh, and just then dinner was announced. A Mr. Belchambers gave Elma his arm, and she almost scowled in his face. She did not hate the gentleman; he usually diverted her with his droll fear of adding a single pound to his puffy if not obese person. But now a dagger of disappointment pierced her breast. Dr. Moncrieffe was going to take in somebody else, and they might be placed abysmally apart. A feline rage at Mrs. Cassilis beset Elma; she would have liked to deal that lady a disfiguring scratch.

"*So mean of her—so miserably mean!*" she

almost said aloud. Yet for her life she could not have told why she denounced it as mean. Mrs. Cassilis had not told her that she and Moncrieffe should be companioned during the dinner. "Of course she's going to keep him to herself," ran on Elma's angry thoughts, forgetful of her hostess's notorious husband-worship. "I'd no *idea* he was so handsome. His evening-dress brings him *out* so." (She had taken in every detail of both his countenance and attire though she had hardly seemed to give him a glance.) "He looks perfectly angelic. Perhaps he may be on my other side. If not I shall never forgive Caroline Cassilis—*never!*"

IX.

MONCRIEFFE was, as it proved, on her "other side," and she felt like venting a delighted scream as this fact became known to her. The long table was a lovely fantasy of silver and candle-light and flowers, isled in the soft gloom of an immense low-ceiled dining-room.

Elma chose to address herself to Mr. Bell-chambers. Her action in thus at first ignoring Moncrieffe and speaking to a person who could never more than meagerly interest her, was wayward, complex, epicurean, characteristic.

"Oh, dear, what a charming house this is! It makes me as *jealous*, every time I come here!"

"Why should you, of all people, feel so," said Mr. Bellchambers, "with that splendid stone castle of your father's down by the river?"

"Oh, this monstrous chalet is so much airier and slenderer and more delicate."

"*You* oughtn't to like airy and slender and delicate things," sighed Mr. Bellchambers. "You're all that yourself. I only wish—"

And then he paused, while Elma gave one of her high laughs.

"Dear, dear! Are you still so afraid of getting stouter?"

"Afraid?" he shuddered. "That's no word for it. I lie awake nights thinking about it. When I gain a pound of flesh I reverse the usual form of speech and call it 'losing.' Last month I 'lost' six pounds. How on earth it happened I can't conceive."

"Perhaps," Elma suggested, "you ate a crumb of bread inadvertently. Didn't you tell me bread was fearfully fattening?"

"Yes, fearfully. I confine myself strictly to meat, eggs and green vegetables. I never drink a drop of any liquid with my meals. And yet I've 'lost' that amount of flesh. It's agonizing."

"But you're well?—you're not in the least ill?" said Elma, with jollity. It seemed so much easier to let herself be amused by Mr. Bellchambers, now that she knew Moncrieffe could be turned to and talked with at a moment's notice.

"Well? Ill? Oh, it's not at all a question

of health. It's a question of peace and contentment."

"I see; yours are dependent upon the amount you weigh. Well, it isn't everybody who can subject his happiness to such exact calculations."

"The process isn't a successful one with me, I can assure you," mourned Mr. Bellchambers, looking at a green-tinted glass of Rhenish wine longingly from between his pink, fat eyelids. "A new household trouble has lately risen up for me, owing altogether to my dietetic tendencies."

"A household trouble?" queried Elma. "Good Heavens, what *are* you saying? If ever there were two turtle-doves of matrimony they've always seemed to me you and Mrs. Bellchambers."

"Don't call us turtle-doves any longer, my dear Miss Blagdon. Call us Mr. and Mrs. Jack Spratt. Yes, I mean it. We strike each other as the most abnormally funny pair nowadays; we seem to have stepped right out from the weirdest exaggerations of Dickens. . ."

Meanwhile Mrs. Bellchambers, whom Moncrieffe had taken in, and who was a spare lady with that look of chronic alarm which belongs to a face having scant whitish eyebrows that slant upward at either temple, was forlornly saying in his ear:

"Yes, Dr. Moncrieffe, I don't mind telling you that I'm famished — literally famished. When I received Mrs. Cassilis's invitation to dine, I hailed it with delight." Then she explained, with detailed solemnity, her husband's

avoidance of all fattening food. "We're not rich; we're not among the mighty land-holders of Riverview. We've only a small house over by the Van Boskirck road, and, as I never hesitate to tell anybody, we've a small income besides. And for this reason I find that I simply cannot afford to provide two separate tables every day, especially as our four children are now all getting on in years. But to eat only what Mr. Bellchambers wishes for himself will, before long, make us a family of skeletons. For Mr. Bellchambers (though he would haughtily deny it if he heard me) is a very large eater indeed. That is why his unfattening food doesn't reduce him; he eats so much of it. Hence I am compelled to provide every day, for example, a really copious dinner, more or less like this: No soup—Mr. Bellchambers will not touch soup, though we are all very fond of it; a large fish, of some sort, though he alone really cares for fish; a joint of very lean meat, though the children and I often positively crave a slice of fat; green vegetables, of which there are never very many, and sometimes no good ones at all. If the children and I have sweets for dessert we always eat them guiltily; for we're aware, every one of us, that Mr. Bellchambers adores sugar in all possible forms. And it's the same way with potatoes; I realize his sufferings, and abstain. Not that he isn't often *very* self-sacrificing. Only the other day he said to me with tones full of quiet courage, 'My dear Mary Ellen, *have* potatoes to-day, or if not those, have

tapioca pudding.' I assure you, doctor, the tears came into my eyes when he pronounced those words, 'tapioca pudding'; for I *know* how he *worships* tapioca pudding. So I could not find it in my heart to inflict upon him *two* ordeals, like that, both in the same dinner. We had *potatoes*, and he behaved with beautiful self-control; but I insisted that our dessert should be, as usual, a minus quantity."

Moncrieffe had by this time so far recovered from his surprise as to say venturingly: "But is not all this vexation avoidable by a little philosophy on Mr. Bellchambers's part?"

"You mean—eating everything and letting himself grow stout? Oh, mercy, he'd rather *die*! But I thought, Dr. Moncrieffe, that possibly you might know of something he could take *with* his meals that would make his continual dieting unnecessary. Oh, what a blessing such a drug would be in our little home! They talk of the gold-cure, doctor, for drunkenness. How delightful to have something of the same sort for *stoutness*!"

It was very long after this that a voice said softly, in what might be called Moncrieffe's unoccupied ear:

"How do you get on, doctor, with Mrs. Jack Spratt? I hope she's more exciting than her liege lord here on my right?"

Moncrieffe kept in bounds a betraying laugh. "She's harrowed me with certain doleful confidences."

"Yes, really? Do tell me what they were.

Then I'll tell you some that *I've* just received. Let's make an exchange; it will be such fun!"

Her manner had lost its novelty for him, and hence its shock as well. Her intimate and easy way of plunging into conversation affected him refreshingly. He felt toward her a swift attraction, of the sort which she roused in nearly all men whom she chose to treat civilly. It so differed from the kind of charm another woman had but lately exerted and maintained over him, that he could not help making a rapid mental comparison of the two sensations, and not at all flatteringly to the last.

He told her, in discreet semitone, about the sorrows of Mrs. Bellchambers, and with voice pitched less prudently she returned him an account of those which the lady's husband had imparted. She seemed to enjoy vastly their comparison of notes; it struck him admiringly, at times, that she bubbled over with a most brilliant humor in her comments on this phenomenal pair. But just as everything in her deportment had previously imbued him with the idea of willfulness and despotism, so now did her sudden change of subject increase this impression.

"I don't want to talk about them any more," she announced. "They're caricatures, though more or less unconscious ones. And caricatures are never particularly interesting to me; they've so little to do with the earnest and actual part of life. I think (don't you?) that they're like the light farce that one sees

at a theater before the real play begins. You laugh *at* them, but you don't laugh *with* them. Now, I prefer the solid tragi-comedy (for I suppose that's how life can most justly be defined) where you can both laugh and cry in keen human sympathy with the players."

"And sometimes feel very much like hissing them as well?" he hazarded.

"Are you *cynical*?" she exclaimed, with a quick turn of her lithe shape toward his. "I should never have suspected it of you."

He felt her look roam his face, lengthwise, crosswise, penetrantly, dubiously. It was a look full of such insolent yet stingless familiarity that his laugh gave it quite as spontaneous a reply.

"Did you think me only an amiable, struggling young doctor, fragrant with polite platitudes?"

"No," she said, brusquely, "I thought nothing so silly of you. Your face prevented that."

"Thanks. I didn't know you'd observed it—till just now."

"Oh, I took you in that day at Mrs. Thirlwall's. I sized you up, as papa would say. Poor papa, I ought to be ashamed to foist my slang upon him. I'm not afraid of using slang whenever I wish."

"Perhaps you mean that by employing it you rob it of vulgarity."

"You say that as if you thought I didn't and couldn't," she bristled. "But you're wrong. I can and do. I never permit myself to be vul-

gar; I only permit myself occasionally to talk as if I were. There's a great difference; some time, when you know me better, you'll understand it. You see, I take for granted that you *will* know me better."

"A very flattering assumption. And then you will have perceived that I am not cynical."

"I hope to have perceived a good many things about you."

"Some very disappointing ones, no doubt."

"Oh, that depends. I may not have such very grand expectations."

"You would be more than foolish if you did. At the beginning of my career I feel stimulated by the conviction that I'm safely commonplace."

"You couldn't have said that if you were. Besides, I'd heard too much of you already to believe so. Yesterday I went again over to the Thirlwalls'. I needn't tell you how they sounded your praises *there*!"

"'They'?" said Moncrieffe, coloring. "You mean, I suppose, Mrs. Thirlwall. She's been good enough to like me most cordially, and to let me like her in return."

"She's a dear, isn't she?" rhapsodized Elma. "I don't wonder she has heart *trouble*; she's *all* heart!—But she's not your only admirer. You've made another conquest at Greendingle, and you know it!"

"You don't mean the poor little dwarf, Anita?" he returned, trying not to smile. "I believe she *has* rather taken a fancy to me . . ."

"Tut, tut, Mr. Machiavelli!" Here Elma's

eyes grew dreamy, and she pursed her small, innocent mouth ruminatively. "Of course it's a *compliment* to have such a girl admire one. But oh, there's to me something about her so smotheringly good! It gives me an oppression here," and she patted her chest. "Mrs. Thirlwall doesn't give me any such sensation; perhaps I never credit her with being half the saint that she really is. But Eloise—when I look at her I always think of the line—

'He is all fault who has no fault at all.'

She's so good, and she doesn't seem to find it a bit hard to be good. Now, I'm not in the least good, myself, yet I've a kind of ruffianly, beetle-browed respect for those who are. But when I meet people who behave as if they could walk over burning plowshares without even remembering to say 'it's warm,' I can't help feeling rather at odds with them. I begin to scent self-righteousness, and I've never had very much patience with it."

"You wouldn't, you surely wouldn't, call Eloise Thirlwall self-righteous!"

She looked at him in a queer, oblique, peevish way. "Evidently *you're* not inclined to think her so."

"Of course I'm not," he said, with an emphasis tinged by rebuke. "She's not only a girl with a very modest estimate of her own merits, but she's one who wouldn't at all do for your list of those who find virtue such an easy row to hoe. She finds it a very hard one, I happen to be

aware; and the trials life has forced her to look straight in the eyes are such as would sap the courage of many weaker spirits. But she bears up because she is brave and patient—not by any means because she is—self-righteous. Heaven defend her from ever knowing that she had been so misjudged!”

Moncrieffe spoke with stern force. He was not discourteous, but he was reprimanding and intense. Elma’s face darkened, and then lightened with a kind of irate smile. In her nature was a truculence that resented all teaching of lessons, no matter how well they might be deserved. But this same species of illogical rebellion was now both checked and modified by an attraction which her companion’s face, voice, presence, personality, all tyrannously exerted. An arbitrator herself—a spoiled child from her birth—she had yielded feebly and impetuously to the arbitration of this first positive sentiment, no less real than sudden, which had touched her with its unique spell.

“It seems to me,” she said, with the tips of her lips, as it were, “that Heaven has no reason to be called in for the defense of your paragon. You are amply qualified to sound her praises yourself.”

“I? Far from it. She doesn’t need *my* championship, or any one else’s.”

Elma bent for a moment over her plate. As she let her fork slip into a little cutlet of fish, decoratively powdered black and yellow with truffle and egg-yolk, the state of the silver tines

became a visible emblem of another stab, wrought by jealousy pure and simple. She felt herself hating Eloise Thirlwall, and solely because she had grown aware that she loved this man who sat beside her. It had flashed upon her, as such recognitions are wont to flash upon such imperious and ill-ruled natures, that she had at last found in him the man, the husband, of her choice. Since early girlhood her father had fed her with the dangerous and poisonous doctrine that her great prospects as his daughter would allow her to marry whomsoever she might select. A cat-like element in her rose uppermost now. She veiled the disclosure of it, with a correspondent guile, as she smoothly answered:

"Let me take back anything I said of her that may have displeased you. No doubt I dwelt too securely on the fact of having known her longer than you have done. But mere months and weeks count for so little. Days, with you, have evidently counted for a great deal."

He did not respond at all stiffly, but with the air of one who has said his say and dismissed from its delivery all sullen afterthought.

"I think our brief acquaintanceship has made me clearly aware of how fine-fibered and large-minded a girl she is."

"I see," purred Elma, playing with her fork. "You spoke of her not needing your championship, or any one else's."

"Yes—I meant that."

"Did you mean it in every sense? Did you really mean it as regards—her marrying?"

"No; I was not thinking of that. I had not the least reason, naturally."

"You take for granted, then, that she will marry some day?"

"It had not occurred to me"—he began, and then stopped dead short. "But in Heaven's name," he soon resumed, with lifted brows, "why should she *not* marry?"

"Because she is nameless," Elma said. "A good many men, even if they loved her, would not make her their wife."

Moncrieffe held back a shocked cry. "I don't think," he said, with somber hardness, a little later, "that the suitor whom she knew to have felt one faintest twinge of such recoil would stand much chance with her, even though she loved him nearly to madness."

"Dear, dear," his listener scoffed. Her tones were a positive jeer, and for a second she furtively gnawed her underlip. "What a pedestal you place her on! I must be frank and tell you that I don't think she at all merits your exalted views of her. It's my very firm belief that if any fairly decent match came along, she'd snap at him but too gratefully—yes, jump straight down his throat with very little ado."

"Your belief does her much wrong," he said, coldly. "But I did not know you to be her enemy. Had I known it I should greatly have preferred—"

"Her enemy!" Elma broke in, with hauteur. "I'm nothing of the sort, and your having concluded so is the most presumptuous bit of be-

havior! Her enemy indeed! I'd do the poor thing any reasonable service to-morrow, if she were to ask me."

"I doubt if the 'poor thing' would," said Moncrieffe, who had grown a little pale. "She might object to being either patronized or pitied."

Elma flashed back at him: "You say that only to oppose and irritate me! If you persevere in those impudent tactics here at Riverview, you'll soon either change your tone or be taught your place."

He looked at her in wonder; but her outburst woke also his contempt. In another minute he had the impulse to laugh aloud, and restrained himself, thinking that she might be just lawless enough, in her ridiculous wrath, to strike him a blow. This, however, was not his reason for controlling the laugh. He felt that against such wanton insolence as hers complete silence could be made a weapon of rare potency. The smart of her words, like that of a burn in flesh, came gradually to him while their echoes vibrated more and more through his brain. He pressed his lips together, and felt the food which had seemed but a minute before so savory, now turn nauseous. Taught his place! What place?—That of being an honest man who had come here to make an honest living by the aid of such learning as many an hour of stern study had amassed? And who was she, this daughter of a patent-medicine vender, that she should talk of teaching *him* his place? He would teach *her*

how much he cared for her dollars, tainted with the odor of quack nostrums, devoutly as others might cringe to her because of them!

He took a good gulp of wine, suddenly recollecting that it was there to take. Elma's voice reached him, presently; she appeared to be again talking with Mr. Bellchambers, and he thought her intonations rang, even for her, affectedly loud and gay. On a sudden some one spoke to her across the table, and she answered with her sharp yet not unmusical voice keyed so that all must hear. All seemingly chose to listen as well; and although Moncrieffe did not know it, she was doing what she always did at every River-view dinner where she chose to appear—making herself conversationally explosive and ebullient.

Perhaps no one noticed that her air was more hectic, more spasmodic, than usual. Moncrieffe was at first her only heedless auditor. This same voice had so recently plumbed the depths of his resentment that its mere sound for a time kept him affrontedly deaf to the sense of what it spoke.

But soon the whole tableful of guests grew hilarious. Two or three of them laughed unwillingly, however, and a gentleman covertly sneered to a lady: "She's at her old trick of talking everybody else to death. I knew she'd begin with the champagne; she always does; it immediately goes to her head."

"She's so little head for it to go to," the lady sneered back. "And the idea of her poking fun at poor sick old Mr. Dilloway! It's such hideous taste."

"Awful! Just look at her common old father. He's almost doubled up with laughter."

"Yes. I suppose they've rehearsed it all at home. She's told him precisely when to be convulsed by her stupendous wit."

"I'd just dropped in at the Dilloways'," Elma was meanwhile galloping on, "for an ordinary morning visit. I like Bertha Dilloway ever so much, and this time I'd hoped to escape her very nice yet impossible papa. But he'd appeared, as I've said, and he'd distinctly come to stay. Bertha, dear girl, had whispered to me, as she always does, '*Papa will see people when they call, and you know he has that dreadful trouble, aphasia, and you mustn't mind if he talks a trifle queerly.*' I of course told Bertha that I wouldn't mind, and tried to look immensely polite. And all the while Mr. Dilloway's bland eyes were fixed on me behind the gentle blaze of their spectacles, and I had little chills wandering up and down my spine at the thought of what new horrid thing his aphasia might make him say next. . . We talked about the weather, and how many of our regular residents had been driven to the sea-side and mountains because of it, and Mr. Dilloway hadn't done anything for several minutes but stare and smile, when suddenly he remarked to me, in his genial bass voice: '*You're talking about the great heat, Miss Blagdon, but I observe that you haven't taken off your potatoes.*' . . I felt myself turn scarlet, and looked helplessly at Bertha, and wondered what agonizing thing the taking off of my potatoes might imply, when

Bertha sweetly murmured below her breath: 'He means your gloves, my dear.' Then I stammered some inanity about my gloves not making me any warmer, and the old gentleman graciously grinned. But soon Bertha innocently exploded another bomb-shell. She said she feared the temperature would be almost insupportable among the hot-houses, and that she was sorry for this because she would so have liked me to see a rare and beautiful sight in one of them. 'Oh, yes,' said Mr. Dilloway, taking the words from his daughter's mouth, 'we've an enormous kangaroo, as white as snow, surrounded on every side by hanging and climbing cockroaches.' Of course I couldn't feel grieved that the temperature of the hot-house prevented me from observing such a spectacle, and while I was trying to repress a visible shudder Bertha whispered once more: 'He means a night-blooming cereus, you know, surrounded by orchids.' After this I got away as soon as I reputably could, but not until I had promised to take Mr. Dilloway's very kindest regards to my mother-in-law, by whom he meant papa."

In the tumult of ensuing laughter Mrs. Bell-chambers said to Moncrieffe:

"I *do* think it rather cruel of her to turn into ridicule what is really a most sad affliction."

"It *is* cruel," he assented, and in his thoughts he pursued: "but should that be at all surprising?"

By the time that the ladies rose from dinner Elma had neither again addressed him nor

looked at him. Some of the gentlemen offered their arms to the ladies, conducting them to the door of the dining-room. Others did not, and Moncrieffe was among those who did not.

Afterward Mr. Blagdon "interdooced him round," as the millionaire might himself have said. Moncrieffe knew that it would be professionally to his interest if he now tried to please. but it was much against his inclination to seem as if he were trying very hard to please. He escaped the infelicity of such an effect, and produced an impression of just that shadowy and impersonal sort whose success lies in its inoffensiveness. The company was sprinkled with a few mighty Riverview magnates, all of whom struck our young doctor as rather dismally unapproachable. It seemed to him that their money had deadened if it had not deteriorated them. Mr. Bellchambers whispered to him that they were self-made men, and as he watched them, with either their deep-plowed, facial wrinkles, or their trim, snowy whiskers, or their assertive stomachs, it entered his thought that the making of oneself, like that, must necessitate not only a good deal of exhaustive effort but a good deal of physical maturity. He might have added mental dullness as well, though to this rule Mr. Abijah Blagdon, nimbly and volubly talkative, proved a marked exception. Mr. Blagdon, however, was doubtless tolerated as one of them while not in reality ranked so. He had a most familiar and babbling manner with all, and none offered him more than a sleepy

semblance of disapproval or distaste. Moncrieffe could not help asking himself if the mere big brute force of his money did not drag from them these civilities. They all had what they would have defined as New York "positions," and they all knew how to speak with a very much less lax and vagabond syntax. Except for that fine stone castle overlooking the river, and those millions got out of "nervaline" and other quackeries, would they have let themselves be button-holed, and joked to, and joked over by this loquacious old bit of human homespun, whom most of their butlers could have taught the rudiments of good manners?

"It's easy to see where his daughter gets her loquacious instincts from," muttered Mr. Bell-chambers to Moncrieffe between cigar-puffs (tobacco not being fattening), after they had listened to one voluminous monologue about the River-view road-taxes and another (not untouched by purse-proud boastfulness) about the swindling tendencies of horse-dealers. In this last outflow Blagdon had told the prices of several horses which he had lately purchased, and his needless mention of the sums glittered with an almost piteous ostentation. Yet none of his auditors gave a sign of repugnance. Moncrieffe let his eye glance along their lips to see if they betrayed ever so faintly the tell-tale sag of disgust. But, no. "The might of money again," he mused. "They all believe he's telling the truth, and he very probably is. They've none of them paid *such* prices for their own horseflesh, and this

mere coarse, material fact wrings a kind of reluctant respect from them. It all comes to one issue with men of their plutocratic mold. They start by getting money for what it can buy, and they end by revering it for how the mere having of it will make poorer men envy them."

He at length rose, with a weariness and depression which his factitious smile deftly concealed, and plunged a half-consumed cigar into a hissing bath of somebody else's deserted champagne. He did not suppose that his intent of joining the ladies would cause a general breaking-up of the gentlemen, and felt a pardonably politic regret when he saw them all rise in response to his own movement. But social inexperience had yet to teach him (although he had been bred among the gentler civilized niceties) that on these after-dinner occasions of tarriance over coffee and tobacco, nearly everybody is apt to have got it on his conscience that he is lingering too long, and that any one who gives the first signal for an exodus is regarded rather gratefully than otherwise.

Mrs. Cassilis, before quitting her dining-room, had delivered some piece of playful sarcasm to her male guests about the near piazza being a good deal cooler than the present heated apartment, and the earnest hope of herself and her retiring sisters that they would be joined there some time between then and midnight.

Moncrieffe, who had now become one of a general throng, found that he had only to step through a broad open window in order to find

himself on a very broad and mystic-looking domain, starred here and there with globular electricities, and showing the laides grouped at little tables, dim as themselves.

While inside he had seen the lightning flash vividly, and had heard the growls of thunder louder. As he moved forward a figure slipped from a portion of the piazza which was in dense shade. At first he did not recognize Elma Blagdon. Then a turn of the head told him that the vague face was hers. In another instant it lightened acutely, and a peal of savage thunder at once followed, with an abrupt sibilance of rain.

"I'm so horribly afraid of the storm; I'm crazy to run in the house and hide somewhere. But I've made up my mind to tell you something and get it over. It's this: I think I acted very rudely; I was very angry."

"It seemed to me that you certainly were angry," Moncrieffe said; "as certainly as that I had no idea what you were angry about."

"You didn't know—of course not." There came another flash, and she gave a little scream, drooping her head. Here he felt her hand seize the lapel of his coat. "Please come a little further back; I don't want them to stare at us, for I'm—crying. Yes, I am! I suppose you guessed it by my voice when I first spoke. There, that's better; we're hidden, now, behind this angle of the house. I can't tell just *why* I'm crying. It's partly on account of my impudence to you, and *partly* on account of the storm. . . Ugh! *wasn't*

that loud? I—I dare say the lightning shows you what a goose I'm making of myself. But I can't help it, I can't help it. I mean, in both ways, you and the thunderstorm. I'm apologizing to you, however, and not to the thunderstorm. Gracious goodness, *it* ought to apologize to *me* for scaring me out of my wits. Apologies are very hard things to make. At least I've been told so. I've never made one before; I never had to, I never wanted to. But I want now. How shall I word it? how shall I phrase it? I'm very, very, very sorry, and I ask your pardon with all my soul!"

"My dear Miss Blagdon!" said Moncrieffe, flattered, fascinated, and yet remonstrant.

Just then there came that simultaneity of bolt and crash which makes you tell yourself with hysteric inconsequence that you are struck, unconcerned by the bad logic of telling yourself so and being so at one and the same moment. It was a serious down-stroke of the tigerish storm, and it called a few dismayed shrieks from the near assembled women.

It did more with Elma; it made her plunge her head terrifiedly toward Moncrieffe's breast, and clutch his shoulders with either hand. It was a wild embrace with her, and it lasted until he had slid an arm about her waist, saying something quite commonplace in the way of encouragement and cheer.

"No, no," she quavered; and then, a second after she had receded from him he felt that she had got one of his hands between both her

own. Another flash now showed him her face, whitely sparkling with tears.

"I'm ashamed of myself! And I'm horribly afraid, too, of the lightning; but I'm just as much afraid of your contempt!"

When the rattle of the next thunder-peal had died away, he stooped down and put his lips to the feverish knot her two hands were making about his own.

"Does that mean you *do* forgive me?" she demanded.

"It means any good-natured thing you'll let me say to you." He began lightly, but her unforeseen surrender gave to the next words an underpulse of feeling that quite spoiled his response as comedy. "It means that I look on you in a new way—a more generous, human, womanly way."

"I see," she quavered; "you're reading me by flashes of lightning."

"Yes—if you please."

She still retained her clasp on his hand. "How well or ill do you read me that way? I spoke about her—I said horrid, cattish things about her. I sometimes think I'm a cat—but I'm something more, I'm something better. You dragged those slurs out of me. I've never played such a part before; I'm ashamed of having played it to-night. That's something I should have tacked on to my apology. I tack it on now, in all humility, in all remorse. She's sweet, she's noble; I'm not fit to tie her shoes. Do you *understand*?"

"I understand that you're excited, and—"

"Oh, excited, yes, if you please, but that doesn't explain me. I—I've got a good impulse. I've developed a genuine conscience, and I'm letting it master me. There's an apology I owe *her*. What I said about her birth was dastardly—abominable. And I said it—shall I tell you *why* I said it?"

The storm wreaked its mad mood in another lurid and tumultuous burst. He saw her face as plainly as if day had lighted it. And the sight racked him with amazement.

"I said it because I was jealous of her! Yes, jealous of her! I—I've known you only for a short time. But I've known you long enough—Never mind. There's not a man living who can ever say that he dared even to touch my *hand* with his lips as you've just done. I've had countless fancies, caprices, fads, as they call them. But now, for the first time—" Here she flung his hand away, and in the dusk he saw her glide toward a dusk still deeper. "I was jealous—jealous—jealous!" Her voice, not high, though softly keen, seemed to vanish spectrally like her own shape.

In a little while he knew that she had gone away for good and all. It was only a step to rejoin the gathered company, under the safe-sheltering piazza-roof, amid the silvery twilight of the electric.

"Oh, it's you, doctor," called Mrs. Cassilis. "Everybody's frightened to death by the lightning. You ought to have brought with you

some soothing drugs. And pray where is Miss Blagdon?"

"How should Dr. Moncrieffe know?" shot a clear voice from one of the dining-room windows whence Elma (having chosen some circuitous route of her own) now coolly emerged. "Pray, is Dr. Moncrieffe my keeper?"

X.

THE summers at Riverview are often trying enough, but the autumns are nearly always one continuous enchantment. October had put her richest pomps, this year, into the frosted trees. A wavering line of them, like some parterre of miraculous tulips, gleamed in the limpid afternoon light that shone through a wide, denuded window of Magnus Whitewright's bedroom. Directly opposite this window was his bed, and he lay upon it, his black eyes full of hectic luster, his face as peaceful as it was pale. Close at his side sat Moncrieffe, and they were talking together. "That is the sick man's voice," you would have said, but it was really the well man's. The sick man's was far the gayer and heartier of the two.

"I want you to lie in bed at least three days longer, Magnus. You're wonderfully strong, considering the severity of your attack. But recovery will be so much surer if you give yourself unstinted rest."

"Recovery! Oh, my dear old Basil! It does seem so droll to have you talk about recovery, when you *must* be quite sure just how sick I am!"

"You've a splendid constitution, Magnus. This *is* a rather bad knock-down; but there are cases—"

"Of recovery? Come, now, Basil. Recollect that you're not talking to a patient whose ignorance of medical lore makes him your credulous dupe. Dear boy, you can't practice on me with your splendid gammon. If I'm good for three more years I shall be a marvel."

"You'll be good for ten more years if you'll let me show you how it's possible."

"Bah, my boy! You can't. Were I ten years older you might."

"Go with me back into the West as soon as you're able to move about, and promise me that you'll never think of returning till I sanction such a course."

"Basil, Basil, you know as well as I do what *that* would mean. I'd stay on and stay on, and some day we'd both feel a little encouraged in spite of ourselves, and then, presto! another bad turn, and all would be over. No; if I get through this attack I'll wait for another. Not that I won't try and stave off another. But it's so entirely absurd for a fellow as resigned as I am to think of spoiling your fine chances merely that I may make a pair of doomed lungs give me a mere little trifle of a longer breathing-term."

Moncrieffe heaved an impatient sigh. "Fine

chances! Through the summer I've managed to get a few paying patients."

"Nonsense! you're a distinct success at River-view. In five more years, if you stay here, you'll be able to storm New York and quietly conquer it. I wish I could live to see your perfect professional triumph there."

"So you *do* wish to live for something," Moncrieffe grimly muttered, as he rose and went to the dismantled window, with its brilliant, rainbow autumnal prospect.

The voice from the bed came buoyant and blithe. "You hit my resignation a pretty square blow, there, Basil—a blow right between the eyes. But, after all, I've got my philosophic safeguard. If I *did* live on, like that, I might find that my affection for you was darkly tinged with disappointment."

"You've always an excuse for dying," said Moncrieffe, with eyes fixed on the halcyon hills. "Of course, even if I were prosperous and prominent a few years hence, I might appeal to you as a person who had won distinction only to blend it with discontent."

Something in his tones made Whitewright's brow puzzledly cloud. "That isn't like you, Basil," he murmured.

"It isn't like me as you know me, my dear friend." He turned and faced full the calm, colorless countenance gleaming from the pillows.

"But you've a happy and hopeful disposition."

"Disposition isn't 'in it,' as they say nowadays."

"But energy and purpose are."

"Yes—and how circumstance can thwart and defeat them!"

"Oh, of course. It's 'a divinity that shapes our ends rough, hew them as we will'—according to the pessimist's new reading of Shakespeare."

"I'm no pessimist," said Moncrieffe, with quick denial. "I'm a realist, an actualist. I can't shut my eyes to a certain imminent threat of unescapable failure and sorrow, which taints life like the floating poison of an epidemic. Some people breathe it in safely; others breathe it in and either suffer or perish." Then a thought struck him that it was only the noble courage and scorn of all disaster shown by Whitewright in his late dangerous illness that had tempted him to vent a gloomy formula of faith hitherto quite jealously guarded from his ill-starred friend.

With a gesture full of airy heyday, he veered again toward the view that the window commanded. "What a perfect afternoon, and what a pity that we can't enjoy it out of doors together! But to-day is only one of a brilliant autumnal sisterhood, and soon we *shall* take a breezy ramble in one another's company."

"Of course we shall, Basil," again rang the buoyant voice from the bed. "I haven't the faintest intention of dying just yet. Come and sit here beside me again. That's right. Now, will you let me tell you why you're out of spirits?"

"And you call me so because I merely refer to the obvious fact that mishaps are inevitable to

the wariest or the wisest? But if I *were* out of spirits, wouldn't your illness give me a rather solid excuse?"

"Very prettily said, I must concede. But my ailings, one way and another, are getting to be a good deal of an old story. . . Ah, Basil, it must be bad enough to worry about one woman. But two! I wonder your hair's not snow-white!"

Moncrieffe flushed and frowned, both at once. "Magnus, Magnus!" he murmured.

"Am I really wrong? You know I'm not. Elma Blagdon's in love with you, and you're in love with Eloise Thirlwall."

Moncrieffe raised a hand in mock wrath. He held it poised over Whitewright's head while he muttered, with just the dim spark of a smile breaking through his stormy glare:

"You may have wrung your belief that Elma Blagdon cared about me from certain zigzag confidences I've made you now and again; but as for the other part of your audacious assertion, it's imagination mixed with pure impertinence."

"Why don't you strike me?" smiled Whitewright. "I'm ill and helpless. You could thus forever bury in oblivion the weighty secret that I've discovered."

"You deplorable busybody!" said Moncrieffe, letting his hand drop like a feather on the white forehead beneath it and begin fondly to touch one of the heavy locks that lay there in dark loops. "You haven't discovered any weighty secret whatever. You're only making me the victim of your vivid fancy."

"Oh, *you've* told me nothing, as regards that lovable and womanly Eloise."

"Who, pray, *has* told you, then?"

"She herself."

Moncrieffe gave a great start. "Bah!" he soon said, resettling himself in his chair. "I understand what you mean. She came here yesterday, while I was absent, and spent an hour with you. It was sweet of her, and just like her. Of course you spoke together about me. It was a case of the absent not being scandalized. I dare say you praised me preposterously."

"I rather ran you down, if memory serves me, Basil."

"Ah, you did! How? By saying that I didn't care for her?"

The sick man's hand shot out for his friend's and clutched it retentively. "My disparagement was rather mild, after all."

"As if I didn't know it!" said Moncrieffe, with a husky break in his voice. "You probably told her I was ambitious."

"How you hit the truth! I *did* say something of the sort. I said it just to see how she would bear it. And she bore it with a placid gravity quite delicious."

"What on earth did you expect her to do? Roam the room tempestuously?"

"Ah, it isn't *in* her to do that, Basil! But of course she's heard of how you go to The Terraces."

Moncrieffe had got both hands into his pockets, now, and was tipping his chair backward,

with down-drooped head. "And don't you suppose, Magnus, that somebody else has heard of how I go to Greendingle?"

"Yes."

For a time there was silence between the friends. Whitewright broke it, with sudden solemnity.

"Basil, you could marry Elma Blagdon to-morrow, if you chose. But if you did so you'd be fatally unwise."

Moncrieffe shot up from his chair again, and went to the window. He placed both arms on its sill, and stood leaning there, with his back to the man he loved—the man he loved so well that he would have permitted from him tenfold the familiarity just received.

"You'd spoil your career," Whitewright pursued, with inflexible kindness. "Believe me, Basil, when I tell you that though the temptation might be great, your yielding to it would prove disastrous. It isn't merely that such a girl could never make you happy; she could never exert upon you any but a down-dragging, debasing, spoliative power. Don't ask me how I know her so well. In one way, of course, I know her ill. But I'd heard of her, here at River-view, before you and she met; and then, afterward, there have been unconscious revelations in your talks with me that have painted her portrait with savagely realistic hues."

Moncrieffe's face was no less calm than stern as he slowly placed his back against the window.

"Magnus," he said, "listen: I do not intend

to marry Elma Blagdon. It is possible—I say this with a sense of immodesty and almost self-disgust—that she may regret my decision. But it was made before you spoke. To-night I’ve that engagement I told you of, to dine at Greendingle. I need not fulfill it; your illness—”

“Oh, bother my illness, Basil!” Whitewright’s words were resonant with reprimand. “You’ll go, and you’ll come back with good news for me, even if it’s five o’clock in the morning. I may not be awake, but your good news will keep. It will keep, let us hope, for the rest of your lifetime!”

That last sentence, lovingly abrupt, echoed itself in Moncrieffe’s ears as he drove away to Greendingle about an hour later. Precarious and slender as were his fortunes, he believed that Eloise would consent unhesitatingly to share them. Hundreds of times he had told himself that the sorcery Elma had contrived to exert over him was in no way concerned with her worldly place as the heiress of great wealth. He had got to know the enslaved and ludicrous position of Pinckney Cassilis, and had more than once openly told Whitewright that it was a severe and vital warning to any sordid-minded suitor. The chronicler of these records would now beg his reader to observe one salient fact: Moncrieffe, as he drove to Greendingle, meant most heartily to end a complication which had been causing him no end of disquiet. The course was plain: he had only to get Eloise’s consent that she would marry him and then swiftly

make it known to Elma that such a step had been taken. Out of Elma's presence he always felt strong; in it, vacillant and feeble.

As he entered the pleasant and home-like sitting-room at Greendingle, Anita ran to meet him. She had learned to like him exceedingly, and he in turn had become fascinated by her strange mental blending of infancy and maturity. The effect was at times one of terrible pathos—at times one of elfish drollery.

"I'm all alone," she piped to him, as he took her on his knee, and looked down at her miniature body and womanly face. "I was waiting for you. They said you were coming, so I stole down here. I s'pose I did it, though, to get away from Dunstan." She hid her face on Moncrieffe's shoulder. "He makes me bad, and I haven't been bad since I promised you I wouldn't be. And that's a whole year ago." Here she burst into a chattering screech of merriment at her own mistake. "Not a year, not a year—a week, a week!"

"And you say that your brother Dunstan makes you bad?"

"Yes; yes."

Secretly Moncrieffe felt very congenial with this sensation. The presence of Dunstan Thirlwall had more than once wakened in him pronounced tendencies to "badness."

"Why doesn't mamma punish him when *he's* bad?" cried Anita, lifting one little clenched hand, like a hairless monkey's. "*I* get punished, and he's mamma's child just as much as

I am! And a little while ago he made mamma very mad, and he made Eloise cry."

Moncrieffe gnawed his lips. Dunstan's hatred of himself was now, as he well knew, a raging fire. On several occasions when they had met at The Terraces he had left in haughty distaste; and on several others he had remained, sullenly outstaying the man whom it cost him torments of supercilious spleen to admit as his rival. Moncrieffe had in turn reaped more of dreary amusement than indignation from this smoldering insolence and contempt. At the same time his clear certainty of Elma's preference for himself had filled him with tingles of very human triumph. But of late Dunstan's demeanor had seemed to portend some open and ugly quarrel. Here, he had decided, was a desperate fortune-hunter, balked of his aim and laying the reason of such defeat savagely at his own door. This was a manifest piece of fatuity in the eyes of Moncrieffe, who had seen the whole case clearly enough to recognize Elma's firm resolve never to become Mrs. Dunstan Thirlwall. That it would please Eloise's cousin to have him propose for her hand, Moncrieffe had some time ago realized. Such an event Dunstan would have looked upon in the light of a removed barrier. It was also obvious to the young doctor that this polished cad (so he had grown to define him in his own scornful reflections) would have approved almost any sort of marriage that Eloise might make. He held her very existence as a shame and scandal to his mother's household, and would

have exulted to procure her final absence from it, even if brought about by marriage with so insignificant a nobody as the new struggling practitioner at Riverview.

Moncrieffe hated to question Anita as to why Dunstan had angered her mother and wrung tears from Eloise. But very possibly he would have put to the singular little child-woman on his lap certain irrepressible questions, if Dunstan himself had not suddenly entered the room.

This was a signal for Anita to spring from her friend's knees and swiftly disappear. Moncrieffe rose, imagining that Dunstan would offer him a hand. But he merely nodded, instead, and not civilly at that. He did not wear evening-dress—a rare occurrence with him, even when dining most quietly at home—and his shirt-front and necktie showed a ruffled untidiness wholly foreign to his usual neat nicety of attire.

Moncrieffe remained standing, determined not to break the silence. Dunstan's back was now turned to him, and with drooped head he had seemingly fixed his gaze upon a pair of big andirons in the fireless but wood-loaded hearth. After a few more seconds he wheeled about, letting his hands slip into his trousers' pockets and not only lifting his head but posing it an inch or so higher than was his wont.

"I think I had better tell you quite frankly," he said, "that there has been a disturbance here at home which threatens to make matters rather awkward for you as our guest."

"Those are not pleasant tidings," returned Moncrieffe, with a tight rein on his composure. "If you mean to suggest that I shall take my leave, that will not be difficult, though I should regret going without seeing either Mrs. Thirlwall or your cousin."

Dunstan made a dry, caustic little grimace. "Suppose you were to say 'my mother or Miss Thirlwall,' Dr. Moncrieffe? I take for granted you are aware that Eloise is not my cousin."

The brutality of this last sentence cut its hearer like a sword-stab.

"You may deny that she is your cousin, Mr. Thirlwall. But your mother, as I chance to be certain, does not deny that she is her niece."

"My mother is often unreasonable. She has been highly so this afternoon."

Moncrieffe felt his features harden. "If you have the faintest regard for her life you will humor such 'unreasonableness.'"

"Oh, yes, I know," he said, with a sneering airiness. "But one can't forever keep a bit in one's mouth. There are things that simply must be said. And what I said a little while ago chanced to concern—yourself."

"Really?"

"I'll be blunt." He fixed his eyes full on his watcher's face; they looked as frigid and sluggish as agates. "It struck me your attentions to Eloise were of a nature that would warrant my mother in asking you just how far you meant them. I advised her to do so, and was met by severest displeasure. Eloise, overhear-

ing, became abusive to me for having hinted anything so barbarous. Naturally I defended my position; and I defend it still."

Moncrieffe had seen his motive instantly. It was to precipitate an engagement between Eloise and himself, and thus advance and advantage his own cause with the heiress at The Terraces.

"Whatever your opinions in this matter," Moncrieffe replied, with a slight curl of the lip, "you are not authorized to make them an active force. In the first place your doing so must shock and mortify your mother and Miss Thirlwall; and, in the second place, your denying all bond of blood between that young lady and yourself places her outside the bounds of your guardianship or guidance."

"That was well spoken, Basil Moncrieffe!" cried a voice at the doorway; and Mrs. Thirlwall came into the room. She looked her old matronly self, sweet and genial, except that her bright eyes glittered a little too keenly. She went up to Moncrieffe with a hand outstretched. He caught it anxiously in both his own.

"My dear lady!" he exclaimed. "This will not do!"

She understood him at once. "*That* will not do!" she said, with sudden melancholy bitterness, pointing toward her son. "It is language that makes me, his mother, tremble with shame. Still, doctor, *my* suffering has been *nothing* to Eloise's!"

"Let Doctor Moncrieffe end Eloise's suffering, then!" Dunstan retorted. "Come, now, mother,

you can think as hard things about my behavior as you please; but you must admit that this gentleman has it in his power—”

“*You* should not use the word ‘gentleman,’” shuddered Mrs. Thirlwall. “If you are present at the dinner-table I shall beg Dr. Moncrieffe not to remain.”

“Oh, I shall certainly be present there,” said Dunstan. “And Eloise would dry her foolish eyes and join us all in the dining-room if Dr. Moncrieffe would be willing to send her a message of the right persuasive sort.”

“Dunstan,” said his mother, with a calm that somehow spoke louder than if she had used passionate outcry, “it is not true that Eloise would this evening come downstairs; it is not true that any entreaties would induce her to come. Whatever incentive has urged you, no failure could be more complete than your present effort.”

She turned to Moncrieffe; their eyes met. It was just as if she had said, in so many words: “He wishes to drag from you an offer of marriage to Eloise. I want this from you as intensely as he does, yet with a far different motive. Be silent, though, and resent the atrocity of his demand. He has no right to make it; he makes it because he hates you, because he is poisonously jealous of you. Act as your manhood urges, and refuse to obey his dictates, which are grossly presumptuous.”

“What mysterious ‘incentive’ do you mean?” rang Dunstan’s answer. “I can’t for the life of me imagine.” His voice was very surly and

gruff. "I told you I would tell Moncrieffe what I thought he was expected to do, and I've carried out my purpose. That's all. Let him act now as his own sense of the situation may prompt."

Eagerly, and with lowered voice, Mrs. Thirlwall said to Moncrieffe: "I'm very well; don't worry about me. Let me give orders for your horse and wagon; I know you've stabled them; you always do. Don't be angry at this dismissal; I can't help it, and it's so much better for everybody. Eloise will not come down; nothing could induce her." Here the lovable, worried face beamed imploringly upon him. "The dinner would be a torture—you must see that. Just outside our west gate there's that big willow at the brookside. If you leave at once I'll have your wagon meet you there in no time. It's so much better! And you can write me, if you will—you can write *her*! And remember, my friend—I'm not dangerously excited. I haven't the faintest *physical* heart-trouble. It isn't agitation of the sort you fear; it's grief—it's grief and self-humiliation. Now, do go!—go at once, whatever you may—write—afterward. You've acted just right so far; you've been perfect; I'm with you utterly, and against *him* utterly, though he *is* my son!"

Moncrieffe, with a pressure of the hand that he had again clasped, obeyed this ardent behest. He left the piazza, a few seconds afterward, and passed down into the suave autumn twilight of the lawns. It had been dim in the sitting-room.

Out here, although the sun had set, it seemed for a moment oddly bright. The grass, in its October aftermath, was almost black below the strong yet dreamy splendor of new-sunken day. There was no wind, but a coolness delicate yet thrilling freighted the tranquil air. To watch the grass, dusky and wide-wavering, was to feel how this coolness had crept into its thick, short fleece, and perhaps fancy the pleasure of slipping one's fingers between its lissome spears. The frost had not yet touched its verdure; hence where it underlay with dark emerald the blighted, radiant trees, they shone forth all the fairer in this eerie and silvery light. Here towered a huge chestnut that was one monochrome of gold; there loomed an oak, grown tawny as tanned leather; yonder blazed a maple whose boughs were an equal battle between gold and scarlet. Other trees, less intense of coloring, or perhaps mellowed by distance, gleamed with the smoky purples and reds of old Eastern tapestries. One tallish cedar, in the crimson clasp of a bounteous creeper, stood forth vivid enough to be the living emblem of an overwhelming human passion. But more forcefully still did the sunset express this idea—the lonely, profound, mystic sunset, that died as in few other lands than ours it is won't to die more divinely. Long clouds of the richest amber, laid lengthwise, were like steps leading to gateways of porphyry, where the gates, flung open, showed an opal sea beyond, breaking on shadowy wharves and piers. To climb those steps—to pass through that gateway

—to reach that translucent sea, and sail forth upon it toward the light of the great throbbing star which beamed remotely aloof—such in imagination some gazer might believe himself empowered to do, beholding in pictured allegory both the shadowy voyage and its far-away luminous haven. There are sunsets that intoxicate with their symbolisms, their spiritual analogies. This was one that a poet like Shelley would have loved, and about which he might have woven some wild, unearthly lyric.

Moncrieffe, whom the need for scientific exactitudes had not kept from strong poetic sympathies, looked coldly and even heedlessly this evening on all those exquisite heavenly hints in the fading autumn day. He reached the big willow at the brookside in a state of sharp mental turmoil.

“You can write me, if you will—you can write *her*. . . I’m with you utterly, and against *him* utterly, though he *is* my son.”

These words of Mrs. Thirlwall’s haunted him like a faint carillon of bells heard from miles away, while at the same time Dunstan’s attitude now affronted him in terms obstreperous and ribald. He had not long to wait for his wagon; the promise given him under such pathetic pressure was very promptly kept. But while he was driven homeward through the sweet chill of the darkening country he felt angry rebellion dominate other emotions. He had gone to Green-dingle, as we know, with all willingness to tell Eloise that he desired her for his wife. And the

thought of forever cloaking and shielding her namelessness beneath his name was to have made her possible acceptance of him all the sweeter. But now a hateful impediment had intervened. Was he blamable in not wishing to be instructed by a saucy young autocrat on the subject of how and when he should concern himself with what was thus far the most serious and sacred action of his life?

It was dark when he reached home, and he entered the little sitting-room on the ground floor of the cottage, throwing himself into an easy-chair by the large table where a lamp dimly burned. For a good while he did not turn up the lamp. He simply sat there, full of conflicting meditations, telling himself one minute that it was detestable to be coerced even into making the girl he loved an offer of his hand and heart, and the next minute that Dunstan Thirlwall, with his petty machinations, was an adversary whom it would flatter to antagonize. Once or twice he smiled grimly while thinking of how unexpected had been this whole circumstantial buffet. Who could have prophesied it, even in a man of Dunstan's mental build? Yet it had come; it had dropped as if from the skies, or risen as if from the underworld. It confirmed his theory: we are the creatures of that force which remains latently and severely the same, whether we call it accident or fate, environment or luck.

Still, as he had always clearly conceded, this force was in marked measure susceptible of in-

dividual combat. He would wield against it the weapon which now waited in readiness. He would follow dear Mrs. Thirlwall's counsel; he would write, and within the hour, to Eloise, treating her cousin's whole preposterous conduct as though it were the sting of a gnat, and declaring to her an honest love in language lucid with an honest aim.

Spurred by this firm resolve, and conscious of complete victory over a resentment whose object tinged it with triviality, he rose and remembered his invalid friend upstairs. Had Whitewright heard his carriage-wheels on the drive outside? Their one servant had given no sign that she had heard anything, and the lad who served as coachman was no doubt still busy unharnessing and stalling the horse.

Moncrieffe went softly upstairs and paused at Whitewright's door. He listened for a few seconds, holding the door ajar. He could see a little way into the vague-lighted room, and presently he heard faint sounds of regular breathing that made him sure his friend was asleep.

This discovery pleased him keenly, for he wanted Whitewright to secure all the sleep that could come to him between dark and dawn. He stole downstairs again, and reflected in a droll way whether he should at once write to Eloise and personally place the letter in the near village post-office, or whether he should call Ann, the servant, and get her to supply him with some sort of a meal, even if it were made of uninviting scraps. This hesitation between an avowal

of love and the gratification of balked appetite was prosaic with all the occasional deadly prose of nature herself. He soon concluded, and quite wisely, that he could write a stronger and more authentic letter if he did not write it hungry and dinnerless. And so he looked up Ann, and in a little while she had prepared for him a cold but not unpalatable repast. Afterward he went back into the sitting-room, and began the letter to Eloise. He composed it both with heart and head. He asked her to be his wife and dwelt eloquently on the joy and honor that her assent would confer. At the same time he wrote in merciless disclosure of his own meager fortunes, and in earnest regret that one whom he loved so tenderly should be offered so humble a worldly place. "Still," his pen pursued, "if you will share my lot with me your venture ought by no means to be a desperate one. Before knowing you the energy was strong in me to better my own future; but if you will deign to blend yours with it and let me work for the betterment of both, I don't know what pleasant miracle so inspiring a partnership may lead me to accomplish."

When he had finished his letter he sealed, directed and put a stamp upon it. Then he rose, turned down the sitting-room lamp, and went out into the hall. And so, he said to himself, the die was cast. He felt glad that he had cast it. He knew that any course except just this one would mean moral infirmity. He had risen above all heed of what Dunstan might or might not

think. He had done that thing which is of all self-conquests the hardest to effect—he had put himself, before a person whom he despised, in the posture of having accepted that person's dictation. Then there was another course that he might have taken—or tried to take. It would indeed have been a short cut to prosperity—of one kind; and it might have been only a little longer cut to something for which prosperity of any kind would have proved a dire misnomer.

Katydid and crickets were filling the autumn night with their plaintive yet raucous music; it floated in through the open doorway of the hall. Moncrieffe took his hat from the rack, where his friend's hung in touching suggestiveness beside it. A big gray moth was making mad plunges at the pendant lamp, and every fresh plunge caused the light to flicker wildly. For this reason it seemed at first like some delusion when he saw a man stationed at the threshold.

"Oh, it's you, Andrew?" he said, as he recognized one of the servants at The Terraces.

"Yes, doctor." The man twitched off his hat and touched one temple with a forefinger. Then he handed Moncrieffe an envelope, nimbly sprung from an inner pocket.

"You didn't drive inside, did you, Andrew?" said Moncrieffe, breaking the seal. He spoke absently; he remembered afterward that a strange, cold feeling, like a slow inward chill, crept just then from his feet to his brow. "I mean, I'd have heard you, in that case."

"No, sir; the carriage stopped at the gate out-

side, sir. Shall I have it driven here to the door?"

"N—no—yes—perhaps. I'll see." Moncrieffe was now reading the contents of the letter. It was from Elma Blagdon's father, and its spelling and punctuation were not above reproach. It begged him, quite urgently, to come to The Terraces that evening. "Elma," one sentence of it ran, "has been real sick with a raging headache all day long, and though she says she don't need any doctor I guess she does, and I wish if you could you'd come in the carriage I'm sending along with this letter."

Moncrieffe stood staring at the paper for several minutes. Just now, above all places, he wished to avoid The Terraces.

Andrew, the perfection of a footman, stood with uncovered head and slender, neat-garbed shape. After a while the very nullity and self-repression of his demeanor became to Moncrieffe an insistent demand.

"Oh, very well," he suddenly said, as if waking from a reverie, while he hastily refolded the letter. "It's all right. I'll go with you."

XI.

HE found Blagdon in one of the loveliest of many lovely rooms at The Terraces. It was appointed all in rose-color and silver, with slim

mirrors at intervals along the wall, and branching candelabra in imitation of wax-lights on either side of them. Only two of these modish chandeliers were lighted, and Blagdon was seated directly under one of them, beside a gilded Louis Quatorze table, reading the *Herald*. As he rose, his cumbrous and loose-limbed body and his sal-low, heavy-jawed face made a positive blot on the airy elegance of the room.

"How d'ye do, doctor, how d'ye do?" he said, holding Moncrieffe's hand with big fingers that added to their pressure gentle yet determined oscillations. "I'm glad ye come; I'm ever so glad ye come. Set down. Here—right here." And he twirled a chair quickly behind Moncrieffe, so that its front gently smote the calves of his legs. When they were both seated, facing one another, the master of The Terraces recommenced:

"That girl o' mine ain't well to-day; she ain't well a bit. I guess I may have laid it on a trifle too thick when I wrote you that her headache was a rager. It ain't quite so bad as that. But she's been laying down most of the afternoon, and she's fretful . . . Not much," he broke off, with self-corrective suddenness; "only a little. She's got an ex'lent disposition, El has, ex'lent. She'll make some man an ellergant wife."

Moncrieffe said "Oh, yes," in that mood of polite despair which feels itself stranded floundering on the commonplace. He stared at the little gilt head of a cupid where it prettily bulged

from the rim of the ornate table, and Blagdon continued:

"She'll be glad to see you, doctor. You jus' tell her what you think it is, and give her some medicine. Even if it ain't very pow'ful stuff, you understand, it may kind of act on her nerves and do her good." This, coming from the mighty patent-medicine man, the disseminator of "Nervaline" and other popular compounds, caused his guest some secret diversion. "For I reckon it's nerves, doctor, that's mostly the matter with her. She takes notions and freaks about people and things, lately, more'n I ever knew her to do before. Now, there's that young Thirlwall chap. She give me fits, yesterday, because I met him out on the road and asked him in. She's took to hating him like poison." Blagdon began to make a ridgy fold in the margin of the *Herald*, bending over the polished and streaked cinnamon of the costly table. Every little while he gave an underlook at his listener. "Now, in your case it ain't the same at all. She's fond o' *your* company." Here he shot out a wheezy, perturbed laugh. "I dunno how she'd like my *saying* that. P'raps I'd better take it back." And he laughed again.

"Oh, let it stay as it is, Mr. Blagdon," said Moncrieffe, with a jocose air that cloaked opposite feeling. He knew that this father would give this daughter the moon if he could procure it for her. Despite all supposable longing to have her marry the grandest of grandees, he would have treated her wildest matrimonial ca-

price with paternal leniency. It was therefore not a little disturbing for Moncrieffe to note the present drift of the old man's talk. "You may be sure," he added, still with the same false merriment of manner, "that I won't betray your pleasant confidences."

Then he regretted having thus spoken, for Blagdon at once shook his head with a show of grave deprecation; and the younger man wished that he had said something different, and yet had no idea of just what different thing, in the circumstances, he might or could have said.

"I guess El wouldn't mind much," pursued his host, "if she *did* know I'd mentioned she liked to have you drop in here and talk to her. She ain't ever been the kind that conceals her likings, one way or another." He took up an ivory paper-knife with a beautifully carved handle, and stared into the tiny chasms between its pale rose-clusters, as though to find there some hidden cue for his next sentence. "I—m-m-m—I never somehow had it in me to refuse El anything." Then he giggled, and the sound of his giggle struck him who heard it as both silly and pitiful. "If 'twas a question, now, for instance, doctor, of her getting married." At this point he lifted his head and looked at Moncrieffe with great if brief directness.

"Yes, Mr. Blagdon, I see. You're a most indulgent father. I've observed that before. You're devoted to her in every way."

"Hold up, doctor. Don't go too fast. I ain't

devoted to her in *every* way. I wouldn't see El marry a man I didn't respect."

"Oh, of course not—of course not." Moncrieffe felt as if the legs of his chair had dropped an inch into the floor and then risen again. At the same time he analyzed his own agitation with that electric speed which the human soul, in certain peculiar straits, has power to employ. Here, unless he erred, was a man worth millions, beginning to approach him with hints that for countless others positioned like himself would be fraught with exultant surprise and stimulating hope. Could he sanely undervalue the material worth of the prospects now glimpsed to him?

Blagdon struck the table sharply with the blade of the paper-knife. "I wouldn't care if such a man was poor. Why *should* I care? All I got goes to her when I die, and just to keep her from thinking about my death I'd—well, I'd settle a million on El the day she was married."

He leaned back in his chair, and as he did so a shadow from the altered light fell across his face. Those last words of his had had a queer break in them. His observer realized that the moment was one for him of a most pregnant import.

Then he spoke on, as if from the aidful ambush of that new dimness.

"I guess I'd settle more'n a million if El wanted me to. I can't refuse her anything—I never could, since she was a tot. All I *could* refuse, and all I *would* refuse, no matter how much she might carry on about it, would be a

husband I didn't think straight as a string. Not that I ain't had ambitions for her; I don't mean o' the Astor and Vanderbilt kind; she'll have *money* enough; but I did sort of hanker after a son-in-law that was in high society—none o' your dudes, but 'way up among the stylish Knickerbocker folks—a feller with say ten thousand or so a year at the least. But it don't seem likely El's going to cotton to any one like that. It seems as if—"

The speaker jerked his cumbrous frame from its chair, throwing both hands behind him and letting them stay thus, locked. He moved off a little potteringly, then turned and faced Moncrieffe, advancing toward him while he spoke.

"Look here, doctor, I'm a plain man, and though the trade that's brought me luck has sometimes made me talk crooked, I always talk best when I talk plain. I don't s'pose you got much in the world—it ain't probable you have. But El likes you, and I know the girl's down sick because it looks as if you was sweet somewhere else. And I'll say this: you needn't think the money any obstacle—nor your not having much, neither. Of course, if the other girl's fetched you so that you'd rather have her than an angel from heaven, all well and good. I ain't very well acquainted with Miss Thirlwall, but the first time I set eyes on her I says to myself, 'There's a dear, sweet girl if God ever made one.' Now, my El ain't a dear, sweet girl a bit. She's cranky, and she's hot-tempered, and she's got a will of her own that sometimes the

devil himself couldn't break or bend. But she's got some first-rate qualities, too, or I guess I wouldn't love her like I do love her, and that's better than my own life, better than every dollar I've earned, better than—well, there ain't any use of being blasphemious!"

The old man stood quite still as he ended, and with this sorry mispronunciation which somehow a passionate note in his low voice made strangely august.

"I ain't going to say another word about it," he went on, with a scared wildness. "I'm done—clean done. I guess I've said too much a'ready. I—" He lifted one hand, waving it in the air as if to somebody who had stated the contrary and who was urging him to speak further. But he let the hand fall in an almost sheepish way as Elma glided into the room. His eyes, swimming to right and left, were full of pensive alarm.

Elma crossed the floor and composedly shook hands with Moncrieffe. Her thin face was a trifle flushed. She wore a black satin gown, long-sleeved and cut high in the throat. It clung tightly to her arms, bust and waist, and sent forth little flashes of whitish darkness with every motion. Her body, thus vested, had a kind of snaky lissomness. The copious blond hair was heaped high on her small head, with that intentional form of fluffy negligence which locks of their tint and dryness can best be made to assume.

"What has papa said too much of already?"

she asked Moncrieffe. He did not answer except by smiling, and she went swiftly on: "I do hope he hasn't been telling you I am ill."

"Yes—that was it!" exclaimed Blagdon, only too anxious that she should thus believe.

"Your coming was opportune, doctor. I dare say papa would have sent for you if he hadn't been afraid of my wrath."

Blagdon sent an imploring look toward Moncrieffe, which said, "In mercy's name don't betray me." It was a very rapid look, but Elma's eyes could be very rapid as well. Had it failed to elude them?

Blagdon ambled toward a door. "I'll leave you," he said, "to tell the doctor just what a sick girl you've been."

After he had gone, Elma said, with cold directness, to Moncrieffe:

"So—I see; you didn't come of your own accord. Papa sent for you."

"Is it so great a matter?" he replied.

"It means much to me. You hadn't been here for nearly five days; and I supposed that when you came again the visit would be voluntary."

She let her eyes rest on his face, and he felt the sorcery of them now as repeatedly he had felt it before. Her treatment of him had been variable in the most marked degree, and there were times when it had seemed to him that her excited concession at the end of the Cassilis dinner had been merely a tricky whim, born half of mischief and half of *ennui*. Once or twice he had left The Terraces vowing to himself that

he would never darken its doors again. Then, either having broken this resolve or having met her elsewhere, he had found her a sunbeam of graciousness. Again she had acted and spoken in a way that had reminded him of her reckless methods on the Cassilis piazza. Once more she would be freezing, and drowsily impertinent as well. And so it had gone on; and meanwhile he had drawn his sure deductions—what man, so played hot-and-cold with, would not have drawn them? In other words he knew, without a shadow of vanity entering the conception, that she was in love with him. He knew this as he also knew that an atmosphere which she exhaled from her personality was touched for him with intoxication. She was like some flower whose perfume fascinated yet repelled. The repulsion was often a very vague undercurrent of consciousness—let us say of conscience besides—while the fascination mastered his senses and not seldom dizzied his reason as well.

“How could any visit that I paid you be other than voluntary—?” he began, but she at once cut him short with the curt and placid question:

“Did you drive over this evening in your own trap?”

He hesitated, then broke into a laugh, and then stopped short in his laugh while he saw her brow gloom.

“I see. Papa sent for you. You might as well admit it.”

“And have you scold your father cruelly?”

"I'd be more apt to scold *you* cruelly for trying to deceive me."

"Well, then; commence. After you've finished I'll scold *you* for neglecting your health."

"I had a headache, and lay down for an hour or two. Do you mean that I should have sent for you on that account?"

"Was it so slight an affair, then?"

She gave an irritated start, and leaned toward him, with warmth in her eyes but irony on her lips.

"Who told you that it was *not* a slight affair? Papa, of course. This afternoon he grew—well, unmanageable. Querulous, I mean, and irrational. He said certain absurd things that I resented—that made my headache worse. The headache has gone, now, but something else remains. Do you guess what it is?"

"No."

"Yes, you do. It is a suspicion. It is more than a suspicion; it is almost a certainty."

"And—you'll explain it?"

"Pah! He's been talking about me. He's been saying things to you that he knows he hasn't a shadow of right to say."

Moncrieffe gave his beard a vague, nervous little pull. "Fathers are not always such willing slaves. They have their periods of brief rebellion, like all other captive creatures, no matter how successfully yoked."

"That's very pretty as satire. Did you come here to-night for the purpose of making me a prescription which should be so many grains

of impudence, and so many more of indifference?"

"Indifference!" he repeated. "You're horribly unjust!" As he bent toward her he felt the collapse of inward discipline, the outswEEP of coerced passion.

"You forget," she said, drawing backward, "that we began to know one another on the most extraordinary terms. I committed a folly—a silliness. Anger at themselves would have made some girls treat you afterward with only the most icy reserve."

"I know—and you were far more sensible. You took a middle course. How often have I believed you were merely in jest that night on the piazza!"

"In jest?" He saw the pink color eddying into her face. "You know that I wasn't in jest." She glanced at the door by which her father had departed. "Papa has been telling you that I—I like you. Perhaps he has been madly foolish enough to say even more than this."

"Oh, your poor father has only acted for the best."

"The best? How do you mean? That you are 'best,' so far as I am concerned?"

"Yes—when you're ill."

"But I'm not in the least ill."

"*He* thinks you are."

"Papa?" She laughed, though mirthlessly. "He thinks many ridiculous things about me. For example, he thinks I would be a success as a married woman."

"Of course that will depend upon the sort of husband you choose."

"Choose!" she repeated, with a weary sneer. "We women can do so much real choosing! And in my case—" She stopped short.

"Well?" He could not help questioning, though the very air seemed full of omens and perils, and he had resolved that whatever lapse he had lately shown should mark the end of all further impetuosity. While letting himself go, however transiently, he had with sharpness realized that far the greater reward must be gained by holding himself together.

"In my case," Elma continued, with a sudden defiant frankness, "it is money, you know—money. Nearly anybody whom *I* married they *would* say that I *had* chosen." She laughed again, with feverish hardness. "Poor fellow! simply because papa's toiled and slaved to pile up a certain number of dollars, he'd have to face untold annoyances. They'd call him a fortune-hunter, no matter how ill he deserved the name."

Moncrieffe was well on his guard, now. "Not if he were fortunate in the world himself, for example."

"Ah," she exclaimed, and shifted her shining form irritably in her chair, with a movement full of quick, native grace, despite its implication of displeasure; "you say that to rebuke me for having mentioned papa's wealth."

"You imagine slights," he answered; "it's a sign you are *not* well. May I feel your pulse?"

He put out his hand, but she folded both her own in her lap. "And you say *that* to remind me you are here professionally, not socially."

"Oh, I'm both, I'm both," he said, in the air, so to speak. "How could I come one way without coming the other?"

"I don't need you professionally. Please be certain of that." He heard, for a few seconds, the tapping of an unseen foot on the carpet.

"You are very difficult to-night, Miss Elma."

"Why, pray? Because I will not let you feel my pulse?" A sudden abandonment seemed to possess her. "It's been languid all day; it's quicker now." She drooped toward him, with a slow intensity of approach. "To speak again on that same subject which you just now snubbed me for bringing up—"

"I did not dream of it. I—"

"—Which you just now snubbed me for bringing up. . . Do you think that I could marry a poor man without feeling that the world considered him as worldly as itself?"

"I will say something brutal," thought Moncrieffe, though he would not then have liked that his companion should feel his own pulse. "Best end everything that way, and get back to poor Magnus, who may need me by this."

Aloud, he therefore answered, with a playfulness that he strove not to exploit forcedly:

"Any poor man whom you honored by marrying him would have to face his adversity and find compensation for it in your affection."

"Mere paltry trifling!" she cried with pettish

affront, and sprang from her seat, hurrying to the further end of the room. Here she stood, her head lowered and her form distantly vague.

Moncrieffe suppressed a troubled sigh. Sudden longing beset him to join her and speak kindly words. He knew that her action had been frivolous and undignified, but this knowledge had no concern with his desire. It was patent to him now, as it had been patent at other times, that she craved from him some self-surrendering confession. He could have made that confession, and with a certain kind of tumultuous sincerity, if he had not resolutely held before his inward vision the sanctity of a higher demand upon his emotional life.

"I will not," he said to himself; "I will not! I believe in the force that drags men down, but I keep my faith in the will that can fight on and on till harsh odds are too much for it."

He rose, and drew out his watch. He knew well that in this stronger light she could see his every movement.

"My friend, Whitewright," he said, "has been dangerously ill. He is better, now, but I don't wish to leave him alone longer than I can help. So—good evening. I trust your headache will quite have vanished by to-morrow. I'll go, with your permission, to the stables myself, and find the man who drove me over. In that way I can perhaps get back quicker to Whitewright, and as there is really every reason that I should see him during the next hour, I—"

"Wait, please. Don't go quite yet."

She came quickly up to his side as she spoke. Her face was very earnest and serious; some intangible change in its lines—or perhaps its new and surprising pallor—made it beautiful to him. In her look and air was a wild and wistful tenderness, and yet somehow a certain firmness as well.

"This is to be our last meeting," she said, "for a very long time. We are going abroad, papa and I. We shall sail quite soon, leaving everything for the servants to stow away and lock up. We shall be gone at least three years. We mean to move round the world, but not in the galloping way most people prefer. We shall move slowly. Perhaps when I again see you many changes may have occurred. I hope, with all my heart, that for yourself they may bring no disaster."

As the first thrills of Moncrieffe's amazement died, he told himself that he was being played some grotesque trick.

"Your father said nothing," he began, "of this speedy intended departure."

"Papa has been wanting for a long time to go. I've merely to lift a finger."

"And you have lifted one? To-day, I mean—yesterday?"

"I've lifted it."

"I see; you're *going to lift it*. You're going to do so because—"

He stopped short, and she steadily looked at him. "I'm going to do so because I want to put into my life a new element—forgetfulness."

This was no trick, no subterfuge, no masquerade. Her words rang truth, low as they fell, and her air exhaled it.

"Forgetfulness of whom?" He had no sooner let the question slip its leash than he could have cursed himself for doing so.

"Forgetfulness of you," she said.

Moncrieffe half turned from her. He was fearfully moved. He wondered if she would go on speaking; he said to himself that it would be best for him to hurry away. Fear, literal fear, had made him turn like this; nor did the fear vanish as her modulated voice, without a faintest echo of its old resonance or discord, smote upon the silence.

"Yes, it's far better for me to go. I shall hate and despise myself; I shall think it all over with scorn and loathing of my conduct. But of one thing I shall be sure: you'll keep it all a secret, a profound secret. And some day (who knows?) we'll meet and talk of it together, and I'll laugh about it, and perhaps not feel so bitterly ashamed, either. I'm bitterly ashamed now, and yet—and yet I spoke as I did! Can you reconcile those two things? I can reconcile them, for I know that the little which is good in me has been ruined by indulgence, and the greater part which is wayward and perverse in me has been made more so by the same bad means. I—I should not be judged as others are judged, and I pray you not to deal so with me hereafter. Nothing has ever been denied me that I have cared to call my own. I've had no

trials, like other girls; I was too young even to grieve at my mother's death. And therefore you should use me kindly in your thoughts. . . Go, just as you said you would go; it is better. You can find a carriage at the stables. I don't want you to see papa, and so I'll ask you to take a door here at the back of this room, which will lead you into a rear hall, and from that you can go straight out on the lawn. Come, now, give me your hand for good-by, and let this be the last good-by, and God bless you, Basil Moncrieffe—God bless you and prosper you!"

He turned, then. There had been tears in her voice, toward the last, but her eyes did not show a trace of them. He perceived, as he looked at her, that she was spectrally pale.

"Come," she repeated, and put out her hand.

"I—I haven't my hat," he stammered forlornly. Every nerve in his frame was quivering. He pitied her supremely, and this compassionate fervor reacted in a sense of self-reproach at his own merciless posture. Danger was in every breath he now drew, but the outlines of dread had grown blurred and those of sentiment, of physical lure, burned forth in their place.

She laughed brokenly at the commonplace about the hat. "I'll ring and have it brought you," she said. She made a step toward one of the electric bells on the wall.

He had not taken the hand that she had offered him, but he caught it now, slipping forward as if to thwart her intended summons.

"Don't ring yet. I—"

They both stood quite still, staring into one another's eyes. She let him hold her hand. Its contact pained him with the leaping fire that it shot into his blood.

Her eyes did not leave his own, but she shook her head with quick negative motions.

"It is better; it is best," she murmured.

"Not," he urged, "if I tell you that I love you."

"You do not love me."

"Yes—yes! The truth broke on me when I heard you say you were going away like that—going away for a long time." He stooped and put his lips to her hand. Then he threw away the hand almost with violence, and caught her to his breast.

She struggled with him, while her tears came in a tempest.

"You don't love me as you love *her*."

"Her? Whom?"

"Eloise Thirlwall."

"No—it's you, not she? Don't you believe me, Elmâ? Don't you believe me well enough to be my wife?"

"Your wife! your wife!"

He just heard the words, for ravaging sobs racked her. But he heard them clearly, and heard also the glad eagerness of their accent, which not even her stormy tremors could veil.

XII.

WHITEWRIGHT was still sleeping placidly when his friend paused at his door, about two hours later. Listening for a little while, Moncrieffe at length crossed the hall and entered his own chamber. He lighted a lamp and seated himself beside it. Then he took a match and lighted it by the heat of the lamp-chimney and drew forth the letter to Eloise and fired one corner of the envelope. He held the thick, stiff square of paper between thumb and finger, watching the flames eat their bluish-yellow way into the folds and make their charred edges sag apart. On the table was a small brass dish for holding pens, and into this he soon dropped the blackening yet flamy mass. Presently nothing but ashes remained, interlaced with tiny chain-lightnings. Then these died away, and everything left of the letter which had breathed so much vital love was a brittle ruin that two or three taps of the finger could turn into dark and weightless dust.

He sat for a long time quite still, there in the lamplight. "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," he said, aloud yet faintly, not knowing that he said it. At length he rose, undressed, went to bed, slept tiredly for an hour, remained awake for two hours more, slept again, and so on till it was time to get up.

When dressed he went into Whitewright's

room and played there the part of both physician and nurse. The sick man was feeble and nervous, as morning usually finds all consumptives. It was not until later, when his breakfast had been brought him and he had eaten it propped up on pillows, that he suddenly asked :

"Oh, Basil, how about last evening? I—I was asleep, wasn't I, when you got back?"

"Sound asleep."

"And, tell me, my boy, had you a pleasant time?" He struck out a little eagerly at first, and then let his voice drop, as though he had intended to say one thing and had afterward changed it to another.

"Oh, yes; very pleasant," replied Moncrieffe. He saw that his friend's morning languor laid a veto on his usual volubility, and could not regret that this was true. Of course a clean breast must be made that day; but meanwhile procrastination had its decisive charms. He hated the shock that his news must deal, and from the medical point of view rather feared it.

At the same time he intended no disclosure of remorse and contrition. A certain bravado filled him, though he would not have called it bravado in any sense. Like nearly all of us when we have done something that may have a shabby look to our moral vision yet wears a smart and gilded one to that of our material prosperity, he found he was greeted by a positive orchestra of self-applause. It was third-rate music, and those spiritual powers that could have made better had stolen quite away. Indeed, it all came

to this with the man: feeling that life had now shut him off from healthier and higher breathing-spaces, he had the stubborn impulse to insist within his own soul that he was quite content with an inferior atmospheric makeshift.

And yet, at the same time, a deeper genuine mood of lament and revolt underlay this more artificial one. Could it be denied that what he had done was really of his own doing? Had not a potency stronger than his own will thrallled that will and bent it to despotic and irresistible uses? Even at the last he might have rebelled; but this very potency had tinged concession with lure. Experience had simply confirmed his old belief. He himself had fallen a victim to that same invisible urgency of circumstance by which we have heard him assert that every human being is menaced from birth to death. Reviewing the events of the previous night now when a brilliant autumn sun shone on them with inexorable search, he found that conscience was singularly quiescent. Regret, however, was acutely active, and the thought of that never-sent, never-to-be-sent letter had already become a ghost which no triumphant calm about the worldly thrift and ease of his future could securely lay.

A little while after breakfast he went out of doors and walked up and down the drive in front of the cottage. During the night a fresh tingle of frost had won new glories from the foliage. A few gossamers, brightly bediamonded, yet sparkled on the dead-green grass. The sky was one crystal vacuum, greenish-blue, with a faint

ring of mist at the horizon, tinted like the fur on a ripe peach. Birds in the rich-dyed trees or shrubs twittered their timid allegros. A throng of hawks flew over the lawn with a keen cry from its airy and wide-winged caravan.

The radiance of the morning was for Moncrieffe full of mingled elation and mockery. "Everything is altered with me now," he said to himself. "I have turned a new page in the book of life. What I like about the change is its promise of distinction, luxury, power. What I deplore about it is that its occurrence should have been a matter so broadly apart from my one deliberate volition. And then there must always be those memories—those memories! . . ."

He started, looking toward the front gate. A carriage had stopped there. He saw a familiar face, and for a moment his brain swam. Then the giddiness passed as quickly as it had come. He went down and met Mrs. Thirlwall, who by this time had descended from the carriage.

"Why didn't you drive inside?" he said, while he took her hand.

She looked at him, and he saw instantly that she was both pale and discomposed.

"I—I didn't think to tell the man. I—I've been getting some things in the village. I merely stopped here to—to find out if Mr. Whitewright was better."

They walked up the path together. "Yes, he's doing nicely," said Moncrieffe.

As they moved along, side by side, she turned and lightly laid her gloved hand on his wrist.

"I'm so very sorry for what happened yesterday! It seems to me that I was greatly at fault. I shouldn't have sent you away like that; I should have let you stay and—and face the music. It would have been horribly discordant music, but your going struck me afterward as something with a comic coarseness about it; and that was so very far from what I had intended! But you *have* forgiven! Do tell me that you have *quite* forgiven!" Her hand still rested on his wrist, and now for the first time he felt the clasp and downward pressure of its fingers. "I stopped there at the gate as much for that as to learn about your poor friend—though I wouldn't for the world have him dream so."

They were entering the house as Moncrieffe spoke. This was all torture to him. He felt as if a tangling net were about his feet and the least step he made might land him on his knees. And on his knees, forsooth, before this dearest of women, he might well be flung. There seemed the hollowest irony in *her* asking *his* forgiveness! He could scarcely keep his voice collected as he answered her.

"There could not be any such question between us. I hate to have you fancy I thought ill of you for sending me away."

"Dunstan thought ill of me. Oh, we had a wretched scene after you left. And the course he took was so unpardonable! If he loved that girl it would be different; we can condone almost any folly when the natural jealousy of a lover commits it. But with Dunstan, though he *is*

my own boy and though I love him even better because of his faults than if he were free from a single one, I feel certain that ambition of the coldest kind has predominated. He has no more sentiment for that girl than I have for this parasol. But he's bent on the madness of marrying her—you know why. And he's grown afraid of you. I told him yesterday that he insulted you by merely suspecting that you could make a marriage in the same sordid spirit as he; I told him that if you became Elma Blagdon's husband it would be because of herself and not her dollars. He replied that I had fallen in love with you and could believe only that you were perfection. I said that he was quite right—that I had been so much in love with you for a good while, now, as to find myself wishing morning, noon and night that I only had a son with half your handsome qualities. I'm sure that I gave him a sharp surprise after you left. I reminded him of several occasions when he had flouted my authority as his mother, but I assured him that in this instance he had put my forbearance to a final test. He watched me, at first, in anger and astonishment; these soon changed to alarm. I had in turn no anger, but I was excessively firm. I recalled to his mind that my life-interest in the family estate made him dependent upon me for every dollar he could get from it. And I threatened not to give him one more, from then till my death, if he continued to distress Eloise or myself by the course he had chosen. I even went further; I made it a point that he should also

cease to trouble you in the same abhorrent way. It was hard for me to take such a stand—me, his mother, loving him as I do and always must! But I went on; I was relentless—that's why I sent you away, my friend; I felt that the time had come for me to *be* relentless."

"Yes—I understand," Moncrieffe faltered.

"I told him that I would rent Greendingle (which I can do; though I cannot, under the terms of his father's will, sell it) and would go and live elsewhere with Anita and Eloise. He doubted me, at first, and almost dared me to carry out my programme of retaliation. We stood in the dining-room together; your chair had been set for you, your cover laid. I pointed to them as evidence of the shocking disturbance he had wrought, and I refused to seat myself at the table—I refused ever again to seat myself there in his company—until he fully acceded to my terms. . . Well, he was terribly obstinate, and an hour, two hours passed, before he would relent. Then his surrender was ungracious, but complete. We sat down to a late dinner, which was also horribly overdone. I had insisted on Eloise coming down, and poor little Anita, whimpering from unappeased hunger, was also included. She had expected to dine at the elbow of a certain gentleman whom she adores, for reasons best known to his charming self, and her miniature little majesty was in consequence all the more fretful. We made the most ghastly family party. But I had won my victory. Only, this mother's heart of mine kept aching for a

tender word from Dunstan. *I can't* forget how affectionate a boy he was, and how recent years have hardened, almost petrified him. Nothing could ever really estrange him from me; I wondered afterward at his believing that I ever *could* use my widow's rights against him in that merciless manner. . . . But now it's all to be plainer sailing for us," she went on, with her returning smile, at once brilliant and sad, girlish and matronly—the most purely lovable smile, Moncrieffe often in later years told himself, that he had ever seen on the lips of woman. "I—I thought you might write me to-day. Perhaps you intended to write. But, anyway, you *will* not let Dunstan keep you from Greendingle. I know it may not be pleasant for you to meet him, but believe me when I promise you that he will not make it more difficult than a mere interchange of salutes. And then, very possibly, you and he may not be brought face to face there for a long, long time. So you *will* come, will you not? You'll come soon, too? I've told you of my victory; but it will always be to me a defeat unless I can welcome you—*Eloise* and I can welcome you—there once again beneath our own roof!"

"I'll come again—of course," he said. The staircase was close by, and he added, in another instant: "Please let me go up first and tell Magnus you're here. He'll be so glad."

Springing upstairs and speaking genially was a way to escape the more detailed answer which those gentle eyes demanded of him. When Mrs.

Thirlwall presently paused at Whitewright's bedside he slipped from the room and spent a half-hour pacing up and down the narrow lower hall.

He could hear them talking in the room above; he could note the variations of their voices. No doubt they were talking of *him*. They both admired him—both believed in him; that he knew!

At length he went upstairs again. Mrs. Thirlwall was just taking her leave of the sick man. "Ah, here is Pythias," she smiled, "or is it Damon—which?" Moncrieffe made some light answer; then Whitewright spoke in his cheerful way from the bed. Then Mrs. Thirlwall blamed herself for having made so long a visit, and moved toward the door, diffusing sympathy and kindness from both look and speech.

"Her visit must be longer still," said Moncrieffe to his own perturbed spirit as he again passed downstairs. In the hall he waited for her. When she had descended and joined him he pointed to the doorway of the sitting-room.

"Will you please come in here for a little while, Mrs. Thirlwall? I've something that I must say to you."

"Oh, what a pretty room!" she exclaimed, crossing the threshold. "Whose taste brought these lovely colors together? Yours or—?"

She ceased, seeing his pained, set face. "Ah! you want to tell me that you do *not* forgive me for yesterday, after all!"

"No, no. Not that."

"Then you've made up your mind never to come again to Greendingle because of Dunstan's behavior. But *pray* remember that he is not master there. He thought that he was; we had a civil war; he was in hot rebellion, and now, though neither proscribed nor beheaded, he is permanently quiescent. And Eloise will be so delighted to have you come again! Now, as for Dunstan, can't we arrange that you and he should not meet at all—that is, not for the present? I wouldn't for the world have any household *avoidance*—at least I wouldn't endure any in *him*. . . Oh, I've become a terrible martinet toward him since that eventful yesterday! But I chance to know that he's going to town tomorrow morning, and will be gone all day. What if you drove out to us for luncheon tomorrow? Can your professional engagements spare you? I rejoice to learn that they're increasing every week. . . Or can your poor *friend* spare you? I rejoice to *see* that he's doing so nicely, though of course lung-trouble at his age can't mean old bones, as one says, poor, dear, delightful fellow that he is!"

Often when we are agonizingly preoccupied by certain thoughts, others, obstinate and irrelevant, will thrust them aside. Moncrieffe, in his desperate disarray, now mused: "When a thoroughly charming woman has passed the age of forty, and still remains thoroughly charming, what in the whole range of human association can be more attractive?"

"You don't answer me, my friend," said Mrs.

Thirlwall, breaking silence. She had waited for his answer, and he was only too well aware that she had waited. Now it indeed came his turn to break silence.

He did so in what seemed to himself a wildly plunging way. "It's distressing to me that I should shock you. As one who has advised you to shun all agitation, I—I feel now that I am wretchedly inconsistent."

He sank, with a helpless gesture, on a near lounge. Instantly she was seated there at his side.

"You *are* ill, then? I suspected it. Shock me! Why, you don't mean—"

"Last night," he broke in, steadying his voice as best he could, "I received a letter from Mr. Blagdon. It was given me by a messenger after I had got home here."

"Yes. Well?"

He spoke on and on. When he came to a special point in his narration, these were his exact words:

"Elma's entrance into the room had surprised me. I went there, as I have told you, in a purely professional rôle. She was—capricious, as she always is. She would not talk of her headache, and so—we talked of other things. It was not a very long conversation, but to both of us it was most pregnant, most decisive. I—I asked her to marry me and she did me the honor of consenting to become my wife."

"You're engaged, then, to Elma Blagdon! *You!*"

The words came low and swift. Mrs. Thirlwall had shot up from the lounge as she spoke them. Her sweet face was full of sorrow, yet it had not an indignant gleam. She moved, a little flutteredly, toward one of the windows, with its clear-cut view of gay-stained leafage and crystalline autumn sky.

She was duskiy pale as she swept round and re-faced him. He had risen also, by this time. Knowing how this woman loved her niece, realizing how her recent yet deep affection for himself had given her joyful hopes of that niece's honorable and happy marriage to himself, he stood prepared for some turbulent tirade of reproach.

But none came. "You don't love Elma Blagdon," came instead, spoken with infinite regret. "You don't love her, and your marriage will never—"

"Mrs. Thirlwall!"

She had tottered slightly, and lifted both hands to her face. Moncrieffe put his arms about her and led her back to the lounge.

"Lie down," he urged. "Pray do."

"No—no. It was that old weakness again, but not so very severe this time—not so very severe."

"I feared something of this sort if I told you. And yet I couldn't keep it from you, of course."

"No; you were quite right." The color was coming back to her whitened cheeks; and as she looked at him and smiled the smile had a delicious auroral charm.

"It *did* shock me—and savagely, too. But I should not have spoken like that. There is much in Elma that one might easily love."

"It would be hard for you to find any one quite unlovable," he said; and the words were scarcely spoken when their peculiar infelicity grew plain to him. . . . But in any case, how bitterly false and burdensome was his present position! He had told this woman something; decency and honor had forbidden him to tell her more. But to have made her in any sense his confidante tried him like the most racking ordeal. If she had upbraided him the whole declaration would have been so much easier; it was her exquisite clemency that both disarmed and afflicted him.

"I am disappointed," she said, low-voiced and as if half to herself. "I had wanted it all to end so differently! I had thought of a safe and serene future for Eloise. I believed that you and she—But oh, there are things that it becomes impossible to talk of!"

"Impossible," Moncrieffe repeated, with drooped head. In another minute he lifted his eyes to hers and saw that their silvery blue was brimming equally with divination and charity.

"My poor boy!" she said, with tones of throbbing tenderness. "I thought that I had got to know you very well; and I am sure that I have not erred in my estimate of you. A great deal is clear to me that you have not spoken. I can imagine—I can imagine! How it changes everything—how it flurries one!" Then her

tears came, but with no tumultuous flow. She wept tranquilly, and only for a brief while. "You know my devotion to poor, darling Eloise. It is so hard for me to realize that you should prefer—No, no, no!" she broke off, with a sudden soft vehemence, rising and drying her eyes. "You did not *prefer*! I understand! You were forced into it. You did it before you were quite aware that it had really been done."

"I—I ought not to grant that," faltered Moncrieffe, with miserable disclaimer. He was pulling at his beard with a hand that perceptibly shook.

"Still," she persisted, "I grasp just what you mean. I see your position."

"Oh," he broke out, forlornly, "you see it with far too lenient eyes!"

"I see it as it is. I strive never to misjudge people. She's a fascinating girl; she's a girl of strange personal force. I knew, over a month ago, that she cared for you immensely. She told it me herself one morning when she had driven over to Greendingle. That is, she told it by not telling it—by trying to hide it as much as she could. . . Well, well, you're making what the world will call a splendid match."

"And what *you* call a wretched one."

"I—I don't call it anything. I can't, yet. I'll wait and see. I'll not congratulate you till I have waited, till I have seen."

"And meanwhile," burst ungovernably from Moncrieffe, "you'll endeavor not to despise me!"

She watched him with quiet fixity till his eyes drooped.

"Do you despise yourself?" she asked, very mildly.

"No. And if I did I should despise myself still more for telling you so."

"My friend, my friend, that means you are in great trouble!"

"And if I am! You, of all persons living, should be the last to feel for me!"

"Then let me show myself the first who does feel for you!" she answered, with a rich and instant eagerness, while she stretched out both hands toward him. "If I can do anything—*anything* to help you, command me! And remember, it will be all for yourself. It will be disinterested; it will be—"

"You're a saint! You're more—you're an angel!" he answered, catching one of her hands and pressing it to his lips. "But now—now. . ." And he dropped her hand as though it were something frangible and sacred. . . "Now destiny has me in full mid-stream, and is bearing me straight onward, God help me! . . ." His voice broke, then.

"God *bless* you!" she said, and her lips lightly touched his brow.

"How can Dunstan Thirlwall be what he is," swept through Moncrieffe's mind, "with this incomparable woman for his mother?"

XIII.

LATER he regretted her goodness. He would have liked it better if she had stung him with censure. He knew, that morning, when he took her to her carriage and received from her a farewell pressure of the hand, that he had thrust a dagger into her benign bosom. It had not been merely that she wanted to marry her beloved Eloise to an honorable man whose name would cover the girl's pathetic namelessness. It had been that she wanted to make him, Basil Moncrieffe, the husband of Eloise because she exceptionally prized and trusted him. And Moncrieffe, who dreaded the result to her health, dreaded it in like way to her happiness. Her presence kept haunting him with a more accusative persistence than did that of Eloise. At the same time he stoutly resented all compunctious monitions. He held to his faith in having been pushed where he now stood. But it was hard to play martyr, he soon found, even in his most solitary musings. Elma dawned upon him twice a day, and always with demure bewitchment. What now and delightful self had she revealed? Whither had flown her madcap humors? Never was there a more duteous and yielding daughter, never a sweetheart more modest and fond.

The engagement soon transpired, and all River-view shouted with surprise. The news flew from one home to another, and pity for "poor old

Blagdon" kept continual pace with it. But when Mr. Blagdon was afterward seen by this or that commiserator, his demeanor did not look at all touching. He seemed, indeed, to have found a son-in-law of whom he was particularly proud.

"They certainly do make a *handsome* couple," said Mrs. Bellechambers, at one of the Riverview ladies' luncheons. Like nearly everybody else, she thought it a most unfortunate affair. The whole patrician settlement tingled with dissatisfaction. If Dunstan Thirlwall had been the chosen swain, nothing could have seemed more appropriate. But an heiress like that giving herself to a nobody, and a newcomer as well! There were surely twenty-five mothers dwelling here beside the radiant Hudson, who had dreamed ambitious dreams for their sons; and through these dreams the shape of Elma had gone trippingly, with her unconventionalisms and audacities.

"*I* think them a most strikingly handsome couple," said Mrs. Cassilis, who was delighted at the match and whose tormenting ghost was now comfortably laid.

"Heavens, my dear," said a certain Mrs. Pomeroy Perkins, a lady with four somewhat raw-boned sons, "you can't mean that you think *her* in the faintest way *pretty*!"

"Her engagement has made her so," said Mrs. Cassilis. "She has that look an engaged girl often gets, even when she's quite plain."

"Well," said another lady, the devoted mother

of two rather engaging and enterprising sons, "she'll lead him a dance before she's done with him! For my part, I shouldn't be *overwhelmed* with wonder to hear that she had thrown him over *any* day!"

Mrs. Cassilis colored, and thought of her imperiled Pinckney. "Oh, my dear Mrs. Powerscourt! She's perfectly crazy about him. Have you happened to see them together?"

"No," returned the lady, with her chin at an unwonted elevation. "The truth is—er—I haven't called since it was announced. I suppose I must; but that girl *is* such a barbarian!"

Here a plump little lady whom everybody thought keenly vulgar but whose vulgarity was accepted and put up with because she had a Knickerbocker name and about thirty thousand a year behind it, said with a sort of rollicking candor:

"Oh, pooh! Elma's got her weak points. She's often a pill to swallow, but then it's a gilded pill. And so, for *my* part, I confess I'm furious that my Jimmy didn't get her. She was dreadfully nice to him all through June, and just before her present divinity arrived she dropped him. I'm so glad it *was* just before. Jimmy and Dunstan Thirlwall were then running almost neck-and-neck. If Dunstan had come in first I should have died with envy. But this dark horse wins the race, so I feel considerably less flattened out."

"How infamously tasteless and tactless Kate Van Tassell ~~can~~ be!" whispered Mrs. Powers-

court to Mrs. Bellchambers. "I'm not surprised that she wanted such a hoydenish daughter-in-law as Elma Blagdon. They would certainly have been congenial."

"I can't believe," said Mrs. Bellchambers, rather airily to Mrs. Van Tassell, "that your dark horse, as you so—m-m—*forcibly* describe Dr. Moncrieffe, *will* win at the last. I'm simply *waiting* to hear that she's changed her mind, or else that her tantrums and capers have forced him to change his."

This view of the engagement was not unlike that of Magnus Whitewright. For a while Moncrieffe had waited, dreading to tell him the truth. Then he had done so with a gradual tenderness of recital, beginning with vague statements and finally seizing in both hands, as it were, the suspicion that he had created, and turning it peremptorily into assurance.

Whitewright was up and about, by this. He and his friend were together in the sitting-room downstairs. Outside the weather still stayed fresh and sunny, but even the briefest open-air walk was yet forbidden the invalid.

"So you did it—so you did it!" Whitewright murmured, slowly nodding, as if in somber soliloquy.

Moncrieffe got up from his chair with a great relieved sigh. He stood beside the table near which his friend sat, enmantled by two protective shawls, one of which he had just tossed almost wholly aside.

"I've told you everything, now, Magnus.

You're the only being on earth to whom I *would* have told everything, like this."

"Yes. It's all plain. She was in love with you and she said so. You—taken at a weak moment, a moment when the insolence of Dunstan still rankled in your breast—ensnared yourself in her silken meshes. She threw them boldly, but there was skill in her boldness, too. Otherwise you would have cut loose then and there. Now you think you can't cut loose."

"I know I can't."

"But you would like to."

"Magnus, this is brutal of you."

"My boy," laughed Whitewright, gloomily, "the whole affair is brutal. You don't care for her as men should care for the women they marry. You're in love with Eloise Thirlwall. Yours isn't the temperament to be appeased or submerged by luxurious materialism. Three valets to prepare your bath and three more to bow you into your breakfast-room will not satisfy a certain obdurate heartache. You can feed your pride to gluttony, but only at the cost of a spiritual starvation."

Moncrieffe took a book from the table and began to turn its pages with unseeing eyes.

"Is this," he muttered, "only the commencement of your scolding?"

"I don't scold you; I'm not an old woman; I warn you, while there's yet time."

"Time!" Closing the book with a sort of snap, Moncrieffe flung it back on the table. "In

Heaven's name what form does your 'warning' take?"

"This: Break the whole thing off at once. You can't sell yourself without future anguish."

"I haven't sold myself! It's atrocious for you to put it like that! I have simply—"

"You have simply, my very dear Basil, let yourself be bought. It all amounts, as far as your morrows are concerned, to precisely the same issue."

"What you lack in powers of prophecy you can certainly make up by emphasis of declaration. Now, the truth is, I haven't sold myself, and I haven't let myself be bought. I am in love with Elma Blagdon—"

"Basil!"

"It's true. It's true as that I'm not in love with her as I'm in love with Eloise Thirlwall."

"And you call both feelings—love?"

"Incontestably. Ah, Magnus, there was never a sillier fallacy than that which affirms a man cannot love two women at once—or three, either, for that matter, or even four."

"Where would you draw your line?" asked Whitewright. "At fifty or a hundred?"

"At the capacity of the individual. It differs in different men. But few of us are not polygamists at heart, deny it as stoutly as we may."

"I didn't know you hankered after a harem."

"I! The thought of one is loathsome to me—and you know it. Perfect marriage, for a man, is the selection of that one woman who pleases

him best above all others. But it is nonsense to claim that only one *can* please him."

"And so you believe yourself to have made a choice that is not perilous, is not menacing to your peace hereafter?"

"I made no choice."

"How can you say that, Basil?"

"I made no choice. I insist upon it that I made none. I went that night to Greendingle, Magnus, with the firm intent of offering myself to Eloise. You know what happened there; I've told you everything. Afterward, returning here I received that letter from The Terraces. My visit there was professional. What occurred later, on my arrival at The Terraces, you also know—in part."

"In part—yes. And you would have me believe that you then became non-responsible for your actions and words?"

"Yes." Here Moncrieffe threw himself back into the chair that he had quitted. "I swear to you, Magnus, that I was no longer, in the vaguest sense, a free agent."

Whitewright impatiently jostled a fold of shawl from one shoulder. A bitter smile crept between his pale lips, that so many genial smiles had lighted.

"Where, then, was your will, Basil? Would you have me credit the old tales of the sorceresses and witch-women?"

Moncrieffe nodded grimly. "They were, no doubt, tales founded on fact." He put one leg over its neighbor knee, and leaned forward,

staring into his friend's face with intensest fervor. "Magnus, Magnus, a whirlwind of fate caught me and did with me what it chose! Only a little while ago I told you my belief in that outside force which may seize upon us and work its will with us, whether we rebel or accede. I did not then dream that I was so near to being grasped and overthrown, myself, in just this despotic way. But I swear to you that I became powerless. You . . . you have not forgotten," he added, with a sudden hesitancy and hoarseness, "that letter which I told you . . . I had . . . written Eloise . . . just after my return from Greendingle."

"And which you burned," came White-wright's quick reply, with an inflection of the most uncharacteristic harshness. "Which you burned, Basil, on your final home-coming. Ah, you were not powerless when you did that!"

"Good Heavens! you would not have had me send it, after—?"

"I would have had you keep it. Granted that this whirlwind *did* sweep you away. Whirlwinds often leave their survivors, as in your case, the strength to repair what injuries they have inflicted. The next morning you could have written Elma Blagdon another letter—"

"Magnus!"

"Or, better, you could have gone to see her—to see her father—"

"Oh, *Magnus!* "

"Anything, anything would have been pref-

erable to your having *let* this so-termed whirlwind sweep you quite away!"

Here a sudden coughing-fit came upon Whitewright, and in an instant Moncrieffe had sprung from his chair. He caught his friend lovingly in both arms while the attack lasted. It was not severe or long, but to Moncrieffe's overbending face had rushed a look of startled distress.

"I'm afraid excitement has brought this on," he said, very tenderly. "Let us talk of other things now, Magnus. That will be far the wiser plan."

Whitewright pressed his handkerchief to his mouth for a moment, and then, a little tremulously, brushed it across his lips.

"The wiser plan, Basil?" His eyes, burningly dark, seemed now to flash entreaty upon his friend's anxious face. "The wiser plan is to take this imp of fate by the throat and throttle it. Sit down, now, in my presence, and write Elma Blagdon a letter. I'll dictate it; I'll tell you every word to write. My body may be sick, but my mind isn't. Come, now; do as I say!" He found one of Moncrieffe's hands and clasped it with tight-clinging fingers. "I'm right, Basil; I'm right. Some day you'll thank me, if you don't thank me now."

There came a silence. Moncrieffe let his hand stay firmly clutched like that. His color had quite faded before he again spoke.

"No, Magnus. What you counsel would be dishonor."

Whitewright softly pushed aside the hand which he had been holding.

"Very well," he sighed. "So be it. I am showing you the way out of the tangle, and you turn your eyes from my proffered clew!"

Moncrieffe sank on his knees beside the invalid's chair and re-gathered about his chest the shawl which had slipped from it.

"Ah, you show me, my dear Magnus," he cried, "a way that I have already thought of, but one that I dare not walk in, for fear of too torturing a self-contempt!"

XIV.

At the end of the first fortnight in November Moncrieffe's marriage to Elma Blagdon occurred. He had not seen Dunstan Thirlwall since his engagement, but with brazen effrontery that young gentleman appeared at his wedding. He wore a faint, petrified smile, and his manners were mantled with an inscrutable repose. His presence said to Moncrieffe: "I am here because I did not choose to stay away and have you think I was grinding my teeth and cursing you. And now you perceive that I am coolly walking about these drawing-rooms and do not show you, in your victory, the faintest trace of chagrin." But Moncrieffe, if he gave his former rival a thought at so preoccupying a time, must only have regretted that another who bore his

name had not come in his place. Of course he did not mean Eloise, nor had he had any expectation of seeing her, or indeed any such desire save one clouded and acerbated by pain. But with Mrs. Thirlwall it was different, and he longed to find in her sweet, altruistic eyes an assurance, however dim, that the loss of Eloise's love did not mean loss of her own friendship. For in many ways that friendship was as dear to him as Whitewright's, and sanctified in her case as in his by the shadow of brooding if not imminent death.

As for the other guests, all Riverview was asked, and all Riverview came. It made a gallant showing, too, with its fineries of equipage and attire. The wedding took place at about noon, in one of the drawing-rooms of The Terraces, and the day was perfect. It was not really Indian summer, yet the air held hazy hints of that season. Beyond black traceries and columnar trunks of leafless trees the splendid river swept its burning blue. Here and there it gave out a little wintry sparkle that the blandness of the long, fitful, sighing breezes belied. The atmosphere was full of milky azure softness that turned to actual pearl above the sharp levels of the Palisades. Now and then, below the terraced descent, become quite flowerless, and tarnished if not really tawny, you heard the roars of speeding trains and caught sight of smoke that voyaged in whorls and spirals through the crystal yet mellowed medium of the air. In reality the landscape was

waiting for winter; one could fancy that the bounteous and burnished river itself might be already touched with dreams of ice-locked scintillance. And yet nature, in her faded mildness and glimmering helplessness, appeared to yearn for respite from those hostile rigors, even while she resigned herself to their strenuous advent.

A few people came from town to the wedding. They were mostly of a sort that mated ill with the other guests, and kept in little knots and cliques by themselves. Mr. Blagdon was immensely civil to them, and when the sumptuous breakfast was served, busied himself in seeing that no dainty escaped their chance of choice. Some of the Riverview folk had come with a keen intent of ridicule; but Elma had long ago foreseen that; there was never so self-poised and broad-glancing a bride. She had not more shrewdly supervised her own costume, with its opulent yet unexaggerated folds of satin, its superb yet tasteful array of jewels, its costly yet irreproachable veil, than she had pre-directed every detail of the festivity itself.

A few sneers drifted covertly through the stately rooms, fragrant with garlands and clusters of every rare flower that lavish expenditure could assemble. These sneers were spoken in that stealthy undertone of malice which has neither the courage nor the will to be loud-mouthed, and they ran somewhat like this:

"I hear every diamond in that lovely necklace has been selected exactly according to the size

of Mr. Blagdon's famous Wide-Awake Liver Pill."

Or again:

"Where do you suppose the groom got hold of such a patrician tailor? One might have expected from a nobody like him an ill-cut *evening* coat and a set of carbuncle studs."

Or again:

"They say we are to have 'Nervaline' passed round in Sèvres cups instead of *bouillon*."

Or still again:

"I'm told Moncrieffe will soon buy out his apothecary friend over in the village, and build a huge emporium there for the sale of the Blagdon patent medicines. Of course, in that case, the authorities will demand a much larger price for that corner of the cemetery those railway people want to buy; it will soon have become so thickly populated (don't you know?) with half our leading residents."

The "apothecary friend" had been a guest whom many had somewhat eagerly desired to meet. His personality, his marked educational rise above well-known family antecedents, his delicate health, his position as the bridegroom's treasured associate, had roused for those who had not yet fallen in with him among his humble village surroundings a curiosity half careless yet wholly distinct.

But Whitewright would not go to the wedding. He gave as a reason his uncertain health. Moncrieffe, who could not gainsay that, knew there was another. A breeze of dissension blew

up between them. It was not quite lulled on the wedding-morning, but this fact did not prevent Whitewright from giving his friend the warmest of hand-clasps just before their final moment of parting.

Gossip was quickly deprived of all comment concerning the wedded pair. Within three days after that brilliant and aggravatingly correct ceremonial at The Terraces Dr. and Mrs. Moncrieffe had boarded a steamer bound for Europe. Blagdon did not accompany them, and people wondered how he would ever be able to live apart from his beloved daughter. This question the old man soon answered by departing in search of her. He remained in the lordly and vacant house just about one month; then he sailed for Paris, a city which he had visited several times before (and once or twice with ravening medico-commercial intents), and for which he shared the almost invariable American fondness.

"'Twasn't no use, El," he said to Mrs. Moncrieffe, as they sat together in one of the richest chambers of that very luxurious hotel, the Continental. "'Twasn't no use a bit; I *had* to come over and see if things were all right. Not that I want to boss you or him; I just want to kind of set in a corner, if you'll let me, and have you now and then cast your eye on me."

Elma gave a curt nod. She hadn't liked her father's sudden appearance here in Paris, and she had been at no pains to let him see that this

was true. It had hurt him, but it had also comforted him. He wished her to be incomparably happy with her husband, and it seemed like a potent proof of such happiness that she should aim to enjoy his company quite unshared.

"Of course I'm delighted you came, papa, and all that. But Basil and I expect to travel a good deal about the Continent this winter. Shall you like to stay here in Paris, or shall you — er — join us at the larger places, like Berlin or Vienna?"

"I'll do anything you say, El," replied her father. He had plainly detected the veiled note of vexation in her tone. Then he grinned wistfully. "I guess you're still so head-over-heels in love that you don't want even your old pa anywheres 'round; ain't that so!"

She spoke a little fretfully, ignoring these words altogether, and looking with a faint frown over one of his shoulders instead of into his face.

"Of course I recollect that you like Paris. You've often told me that you prefer it to New York."

"Oh, a heap! 'Specially when I ain't got any business to do. And you've made me quit all that over on the other side, so that when I'm in New York I half kill myself trying to kill time. And as for Riverview—well! . . ." He leaned back in his chair, and puckered his lips into a serio-comic distortion. "*That* 'most drove me crazy, El, with you nowheres and yet everywheres."

"I see—you got nervous." She took out a tiny little jeweled watch from the front of her dress and opened it. She had asked Basil to go and buy her a rather expensive trinket which she had seen and liked that morning in a shop-window on the boulevard where they strolled together, and which neither of them had had money enough to pay for at the time. It seemed to her that he was staying a strangely long while on his errand. She looked at her father absently, and then gave her brows an abrupt, petulant crease. "Oh, papa, you're crying! Do stop! What on earth is the use of making yourself so silly?"

"I—I can't help it, El," he whimpered, drying his tears with timid haste. "It *is* so good to see you again, and to know you're just as happy as the day is long."

She rose, walked toward one of the silk-draped windows, and looked at the sky, where it brooded, a sullen drab, over the low, bare chestnut-trees in the Gardens of the Tuileries. "Basil and I are going to drive out this afternoon to the Jardin d'Acclimatation. That is, if the weather permits. Afterward you can dine with us if you want, and then we're going to the Odéon. You don't understand a word of French, so you'd be bored there. But, anyway, as you must be tired by your journey from Havre, you'll probably go to bed early."

This was Elma Moncrieffe's mode of answering those tears of welcome from the father who had come three thousand miles to get a glimpse

of her adored face. He had given her a million on her wedding-day, but to-day he bored her. She would have denied that she did not care for him, however, and perhaps, after a fashion of her own, she would have been right.

When Moncrieffe brought back the little diamond locket which had so pleased her in the morning, she scarcely gave it more than a glance. They were alone together, and she was dressed for their coming drive.

"You were away so frightfully long," she said.

Her voice had a ring of complaint that was already quite familiar to him.

"I knew you were with your father," he said, "and so I both went and came at a rather leisurely pace."

"Oh, *indeed!*" Her voice breathed a sense of hurt that made him start and bite his lip. "That was certainly not very considerate."

"Considerate, Elma?"

"You left me with papa while you strolled along the boulevard, amusing yourself."

He laughed rather good-naturedly, though with secret effort. "I couldn't help believing that you would find amusement, and something more, in the company of your father, so soon after his arrival."

"Now you *know* that's all stuff and nonsense!" she fired, with a receding twirl of her fashionable draperies. "You *must* realize that I think papa's course in popping over here has been simply *babyish*."

"Oh," he murmured, as if to one of the embossed chrysanthemums on the wall-papering, "you take that view, eh?"

She nodded with an effect of bitter sapience. "You seem to *like* his having pounced on us. You showed it by the way in which you went loitering along, this afternoon, and forgetting all about poor me. I know how full of *attractions* the Paris streets are to a man who chooses to *look* for them!"

The jealous innuendo in her last words made a sad smile flash across his face. But in another minute he went quickly up to her and caught each of her hands by its wrist. Their faces were scarcely an inch apart while he said:

"Elma, don't you remember your promise to me? Is *this* controlling that morbid jealousy of yours?"

"I—I did promise, didn't I? But Paris is so wicked!"

"That has nothing to do with my being so."

"Lots of men wouldn't even *call* it wicked, either." She suddenly threw her arms round his neck and covered one of his cheeks with kisses. "Perhaps you don't really *think* it is. Oh, I know I'm suspicious. But love without jealousy would be light without shadow—or at least it would with *me*."

"It ought not to be," said Moncrieffe sternly, as he drew away from her and caught up a pair of gloves which he had thrown upon the table. He spoke with still harsher voice while he stood slipping his fingers into the flexile kid. "Such

love as that is selfish, unspiritual. It lacks due respect for its object, moreover—”

“Oh, there!” she cried, “if ‘you’re going to lecture me I might just as well not go out driving with you.”

“Be that as you please.”

“I’ll—I’ll take papa,” she fumed.

“Do so by all means. In some respects he would enjoy himself much more than I. He would not get rapped over the knuckles every time he chanced to look at another woman besides yourself.”

But Elma did not take her father. She was presently driven off at her husband’s side, and with a rather penitent demeanor. Their equipage had that distinction of make and mode which a few hundred francs a month can procure so admirably in Paris. As they bowled along the glorious amplitude of the Champs Elysées, they won much admiring heed. Moncrieffe, with his pointed beard, looked like a Frenchman; Elma, with her thinnish features, hectic coloring and blonde tresses, might have passed for an Englishwoman if she had not been so irreproachably well-dressed.

The day was cloudy, but mild for winter, and she had ordered the top of their carriage to be opened *à la landau*. When Moncrieffe saw this he frowned, but it was possibly too late to have the vehicle re-arranged.

“Elma,” he soon said, “your scorn of the weather will bring you to grief before you’re much older.”

"Now, don't begin to scold *again*, Basil."

"Oh, I'm only speaking as your physician," he said dryly, "not as your husband."

"In our recent squabble, you know, dear, I surrendered so meekly! An open carriage shows off one's costume to such advantage. Besides, I'm proud of you; I want them to see my handsome husband."

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed. "One moment you're in agonies at the thought of my being looked at, and the next you're desirous of putting me on exhibition!"

But she was proof against another quarrelsome seizure. Her sudden amiability would, a little while ago, have surprised him. But now nothing that she did or said surprised him. The amiability lasted sturdily until they got back to the hotel. Then, as they were driving through the Place de la Concorde, with its immense space roofed by cloudy darkness which splendors of encircling lights made more somberly apparent, she gave an audible shiver and whined forth:

"I'm glad I bought this wrap. But it isn't enough. Besides, I've tired myself walking about among those animals. And then papa is going to dine with us, isn't he?"

"Naturally, I suppose, Elma."

"Please don't assume that stolid style, Basil. I always do so hate it in you. It always makes me think you're tired of my society."

In the gloom he gnawed his beard. "Do you mean that you don't want your father's company at dinner?"

"There you are again, Basil! As if I'd *say* so, even though I felt so! Perhaps *you* think papa will be a relief."

He made no answer. A sickening chill crept about his heart. It was no longer a novel sensation with him; he had almost grown used to it, of late. This perpetual presence of her jealousy, and of something even worse than her jealousy—her vigilant search for some valid reason to be actually jealous—filled him with grief and dread. What might happen, he now asked himself, if this mania should find some faintly tangible excuse for its workings? He often thought, nowadays, of Pinckney Cassilis, off there at Riverview. She herself had laughed at his miserable subordination during the brief term of their engagement. "I did so love to terrify Caroline Cassilis," she would say, "with the idea that I was going to steal from her the affection of her beloved spouse." And what was she now doing, herself, but duplicating and intensifying the same absurd matrimonial conditions?

If he spent a half-hour out of her sight he never knew what wailful or belligerent reception might greet him on his return. At first she had been heedless about all pecuniary matters. Her nature, as he felt certain, was carelessly liberal in such ways; he had never doubted this of her, and he did not doubt it now. But latterly she had grown exacting and particularizing; for every hundred francs that went she would show a distinct concern. This had stabbed Moncrieffe

with mortification. Their letter-of-credit had been for a very large amount; Elma's personal income was now fully fifty thousand dollars a year. He had his own money, but both principal and income were comparatively so meager as to seem almost ridiculous beside her own. Then, too, he had left a good share of what he possessed at home in Riverview. They had had two or three wrangles about this new monetary surveillance on her part, and at the end of each he had realized most clearly that she did not care an old glove for how much money was spent, but that she cared excessively for *what he did with the money that passed through his hands*.

The absurdity of her posture woke his humor, but it also thrilled him with a glooming and dangerous ennui. He had never crossed the ocean till now. Paris was a visual and emotional delight to him. Often he wished to visit certain parts of it (the Louvre, for instance, which he was never tired of exploring) when Elma's fatigue or whimsical disinclination prevented their going together. That in such a case as this he should wish to go alone was inevitable. That she, for a frivolous and baseless reason, should not wish him to go alone, blent in him anger and disgust. He soon comprehended that her love was a kind of covetousness. It stung her to think that in buying him she might not have bought his loyalty, unswerving, incorruptible. Yes, that was a brutal way of putting it, but then the fact itself now stood out before him as brutal as a pitchforkful of smoking offal.

There had been times, of late, when he might reasonably have treated her tyranny with an equal reward. But he would not, as this pharisee, let himself go, and he did not mean ever hereafter to let himself go. He believed most firmly that his neck had been bowed under this yoke quite without real option of his own. That the truth of this conviction is open to dispute, I shall not deny. But beyond doubt he had himself to lay, there for the life, what conceivable, sentimental or otherwise, might have called a martyr of duty. Already he had begun to fear that mutual interest excited himself and Elton. And yet he had already made more than one great resolve that he would endure this work with gladness. In a vein of wardenly morbidness he had even once said to his own thoughts: "What the day it's to become of my theory that an outrageous fortune does put us through our paces willy-nilly, if I discover that I'm able, after all, to wobble with his demandship and overcome it?"

During dinner Elton was plainly bored. They had the meal enjoyed privately in their own room. Of this fact, too, Emma was scarcely aware at all.

"Come, come, El," said her father, "this won't do. I'll have to take you straight home to Haverlow if you get off your food like this."

"We had some chocolate at the Church's," she said blithely, "just before we drove home. Chocolate always takes away my appetite. Elton," she broke off, in blither voice, letting the faintest of smiles glimmer glimmer toward her husband, "I begin to think dear old Haverlow does

agree with me best, and I'm very sure that I'm happier there."

"Happier, Elly?" The old man instantly shot a demanding kind of look at Monerloffs. It seemed to say, "What's all this? Why isn't she as happy now and here as she was there and then?"

Monerloffs said nothing, and Blagdon soon went on: "I should suppose Paris, of all places, would raise your spirits. It used to. When you was a littleish girl at the pengslong you used to say to me, 'Oh, pa, pa, ain't it a splendid city to have a good time in?' And I used to take you, whenever I could steal you away from the old muddom, to nearly every darned cuffy on the Shams floozy, and you'd translate to me the songs they sung in 'em." And now there was a gentle titter of laughter, and Monerloffs heard the tap of his wife's impatient foot on the floor under the table. Elma knew what was coming; she scented a familiar paternal joke.

"But I afterward found," continued Blagdon, exclusively addressing his son-in-law, "that the mischievous youngster always left out the skittish parts of the songs when she told me what they meant, she was so 'fraid I'd get scared and not take her any more to the cuffy's."

During dessert Elma gave a sudden shudder, and looked dourly at her husband. "I believe I have taken cold," she said. "I think I'll go to bed early this evening."

"And not go to the Odéon, then?" asked Monerloffs, with rueful surprise.

There had been times, of late, when he might excusably have treated her tyrannies with enraged revolt. But he would not, as the phrase is, let himself go, and he did not mean ever hereafter to let himself go. He believed most firmly that his neck had been bowed under this yoke quite without real option of his own. That the truth of this conviction is open to dispute, I shall not deny. But beyond doubt he held himself to be, thus far in life, what some critic, sentimental or otherwise, might have called a martyr of destiny. Already he had begun to fear that mutual miseries awaited himself and Elma. And yet he had already made more than one secret resolve that he would endure the worst with stoic nerve. In a vein of sardonic merriment he had even once said to his own thoughts: "What the devil's to become of my theory that an outrageous fortune *does* put us through our paces willy-nilly, if I discover that I'm able, after all, to wrestle with his demonship and overcome it?"

During dinner Elma was plainly bored. They had the meal served privately in their own rooms. Of the first two courses she scarcely ate at all.

"Come, come, El," said her father, "this won't do. I'll have to take you straight home to Riverview if you get off your feed like this."

"We had some chocolate at the Cascade," she said listlessly, "just before we drove home. Chocolate always takes away my appetite. . . Still," she broke off, in brisker voice, letting the faintest of side-glances glisten toward her husband, "I begin to think dear old Riverview does

agree with me best, and I'm very sure that I'm happier there."

"Happier, El?" The old man instantly shot a demanding kind of look at Moncrieffe. It seemed to say, "What's all this? Why isn't she as happy now and here as she was there and then?"

Moncrieffe said nothing, and Blagdon soon went on: "I should s'pose Paris, of all places, would raise your spirits. It used to. When you was a littlelish girl at the pengsiong you used to say to me, 'Oh, pa, pa, ain't it a splendid city to have a good time in?' And I used to take you, whenever I could steal you away from the old maddom, to nearly every darned caffy on the Shamz Eleazy, and you'd translate to me the songs they sung in 'em." And now there was a senile titter of laughter, and Moncrieffe heard the tap of his wife's impatient foot on the floor under the table. Elma knew what was coming; she scented a familiar paternal joke.

"But I afterward found," continued Blagdon, exclusively addressing his son-in-law, "that the mischeevous youngster always left out the skittish parts of the songs when she told me what they meant, she was so 'fraid I'd get scared and not take her any more to the caffys."

During dessert Elma gave a sudden shudder, and looked drearily at her husband. "I believe I have taken cold," she said. "I think I'll go to bed early this evening."

"And not go to the Odéon, then?" asked Moncrieffe, with rueful surprise.

"No," came the answer. "We can go some other night."

"The seats are bought, you know," said Moncrieffe. "It was rather hard to get them, too, as this is the first night of a play that's not been seen here for years."

Elma rose from the table. "Never mind the seats," she said. "We can get others for another evening."

"Ain't you feeling well?" asked her father, looking at her where she stood beside the light wood-fire that was making in its grate the ephemeral yellow turmoil that almost all Parisian hotel fires are wont to do.

"No, papa, not remarkably." She had caught up a copy of the *Figaro* and was staring down at it, between outspread arms. "As you just heard me say, I think I'll go to bed early."

Moncrieffe felt a sharp pang of disappointment, and he could not resist saying: "Then you'll not mind, Elma, if I go alone, will you?"

"Alone?" She swept a chill look toward him across the edge of the newspaper. "Oh, so you'll desert me, will you?"

"Desert you? Why call it that?"

She flung the newspaper aside. "I do call it that."

"Your father is here," he began—

"Yes, I know. . . It's rather odd, your anxiety to go alone."

"I don't think it's odd. I've a curiosity to see this play of Sandeau's."

"Ah, you have!" she said, with a bright,

skeptical smile. "And yet you don't understand half of the rapid French they talk at the theaters; you've told me so repeatedly."

Moncrieffe colored. He had the pride so many Americans take in being thought to understand the spoken French which they can easily interpret on a printed page. But he turned the whole thing off in a kind of half-joke, at a moment's notice.

"Oh, I've made handsome provisions against my own ignorance. I got a copy of the play yesterday, and I've read it through with great care since then. I mean to take it with me and keep a sneaking eye on it under the rear of the opposite fellow's chair."

"You *mean* to do this?" asked Elma, measuredly, after a slight silence. "So you'll go, then, and leave ~~me~~ ill at home?"

"Ill, Elma? You're not really ill, of course. And—"

"As for that sneaking eye, Basil," she laughed icily, "it will probably be occupied in other ways besides the one you mention. At the Cascade this afternoon I saw it almost devour out of countenance that pretty woman in the violet velvet bonnet who sat on our right."

Moncrieffe got up from his chair with tight-compressed lips. "Elma, this is ridiculous." His eyes sought Blagdon's, and found they were already on his face. A natural self-exculpating shame made him continue: "Elma must be right. She probably isn't well."

The old man's features had hardened a little;

but they relaxed, now. "Oh, well, then, do as she wants, Basil. Stay home, and nurse her and pet her."

"I don't wish to be nursed," leaped from Elma, "and I abhor being petted."

Twenty bitter things that he might have retorted here rushed to Moncrieffe's lips. But instead of speaking one of them he walked quietly over to the chair in which his wife had sank.

"I will not go," he said. "And if you are ill enough to need my care I'll give it you most gladly."

XV.

SUCH saint-like concession, it may be urged, could never have come from a man who was not still under the personal spell of attraction formerly exerted by the woman to whom he now gave it.

No criticism of Moncrieffe's course could indeed be truer than this. Whatever the ascendancy that Elma had gained over him—sexual, physical, spiritual, or indefinitely a commingling of all three—there is no doubt that she still retained it and that long afterward, in a fitful yet assertive way, she had never entirely lost it. Except for this same magic and mystery of allurements, rebellion might much sooner have broken bounds. But to yield like this was to use one's own benignancy as the measure of future tolerance;

and Moncrieffe soon confessed to himself that he now had very little to spare. What cruelly added irritation to displeasure was the matter-of-course mien with which Blagdon treated his capitulating behavior.

"I was glad to see you give right in," he told Moncrieffe, a good hour later, when Elma had gone to bed. "It's the only way to get on with El; you got to let her have her head; she'll make you pay for it if you don't. 'Most always, too, she's nice as pie afterward. I guess you'll find the wind in the right quarter to-morrow. It'll shift round sou'westerly during the night."

"Elma's fits of ill-humor are hard to bear, Mr. Blagdon." (Here Moncrieffe instantly noticed a look of haughty surprise on the face of his father-in-law.) "But her preposterous jealousy whenever I glance at another woman is growing an actual persecution."

Blagdon stared at him in a style that he might have used toward an impudent waiter. He almost growled out his first words. "It's early in the day for you to get out o' patience, young man. You knew pretty well what you had to expect when El let you marry her."

"I did not know that I had to expect she would make me ridiculous, Mr. Blagdon."

"Ridic'lous? Oh, stuff! Lots o' young fellers like you would be flattered to the nines. It shows she's awful fond of you—wants you all to herself. Of course it won't last, and then p'aps you'll begin to be sorry it hasn't."

"It *will* last," said Moncrieffe, with sad posi-

tiveness. "It's a part of Elma's willful spirit." (The old man's face here clouded sternly; he might say hard things about his child himself, but hearing some one else say them was quite another affair.) "I foresee that sooner or later trouble is to spring from it, and trouble of the very gravest kind. I've often heard her make fun of Pinckney Cassilis, there at Riverview. I'll not wear the cap-and-bells as he is doing; but before she learns that I will not I'm afraid she will have made much misery for both of us."

Blagdon scowled, now, in most angry earnest. "And what's the difference between Cassilis and yourself, if you put it like that, Mr. Independent?"

The blood rushed to Moncrieffe's brain. He clenched both hands, and drew in a deep breath. "I'll tell you what is the difference, sir. It's this: Mr. Cassilis endures being made absurd in the eyes of his wife, and I will not do so."

"Oho! you *will* not, eh." The old man's face, in its sallow ruggedness, looked full of smoldering wrath. "You'd *better* kick up rows. I'd like to see what you'll gain by it."

"I should lose much more by letting myself be imposed upon than I'd ever gain by standing injustice."

The money-getter and money-lover came out strong, now, in Blagdon's air. His observer felt this before speech made it still clearer, and the divination harrowed him like the scratch of a talon.

"That depends on what you call loss and what

you call gain. You've got a darned sight more now than I guess you ever came near having before, in the whole course o' your life."

"I've 'got,' sir, as you choose to put it, nothing that I'd rate as worth having at the cost of my self-respect."

"Oho," said Blagdon again. He was not sneering; he was grumbling out a kind of bluff "call-to-order" that almost stirred nausea in his listener. "Your self-respect don't prevent you from living on the money of the wife you married, and—"

"Stop there, if you please."

Moncrieffe had shot over to the side of his father-in-law. His eyes were very bright and his face was very pale. "Let me tell you this," he said, quite low of voice. "It was you, sir, who first desired and almost asked me to marry Elma. I did not engage myself to her, however, until she had herself made it more than patent that she desired me to do so. . . Not a word yet, please," he swept on, as the old man, with somewhat altering face, showed signs of response. "Now I propose, in few words, to tell you just what my self-respect will do, provided it receives either from you or your daughter any further hints that it doesn't exist. It will leave both you and her, with all the money you possess between you, to represent all the impudence and assumption you may both choose to air. Before you selected a son-in-law you should have been careful to observe how much browbeating he would probably be willing to receive. In

that respect, sir, I must tell you that I have come, rather speedily, to the end of my tether. If I *am* 'living on the money of the wife I married,' it is in my power to convince you that I'll only live on it with the understanding that you and she both solicited from me such a course of life. We've spoken of Pinckney Cassilis; you'll find no such cringing character in me. If there's only one New York law that will dissolve marriage, there are others in other States where divorce can be secured for desertion. These laws, if you and she push me to it, I will unhesitatingly put you in the position to exploit."

A sudden clutch beset the lapel of Moncrieffe's coat. The large, square-jawed face into which he firmly gazed was ashen, now.

"Oh, Basil! *Divorce!* A—a—divorce between— No, no, no! It would kill El! It—it would kill her if you even *talked* of it! . . . Come, now, come! Let's try and fix this thing. I—I guess I *was* pretty plain-spoken, just now. But I'm—I'm sorry. *There!* Take my hand, and set down, and let's chin together sensible."

Moncrieffe's victory, this time, was complete. He had subdued the plutocratic arrogance of the old man, but as he afterward keenly discriminated, he had won his innings purely because of that passionate paternity which was now the ruling energy of Blagdon's existence. And the latter, notwithstanding his complete surrender that night in Paris, retained an afterthought of grudge and aversion. He could never really forgive any one who could not forgive his idol-

ized Elma, all the way from petty slight to a sense of monstrous wrong.

The next morning Moncrieffe found that his wife was indeed ill, though not severely so. She had caught cold, and as he watched her with the eye of a physician he discovered symptoms of a certain physical weakness till then wholly unforeseen.

He asked her a few questions, to which she replied as lucidly as memory would permit; she was in very gracious mood, notwithstanding her bodily languor, and several times she besought him to forgive her for all her perversity of the night before. He told her each time that he had almost forgotten the incident, which was in a measure true, so strongly had this new discovery taken hold of him. At about noon she insisted upon rising from bed and having her maid summoned to dress her; but hardly had she placed her feet upon the floor than she fainted completely away. The maid ran in great alarm to Moncrieffe, who chanced to be close at hand, only a threshold or so aloof. The attack that followed was a spasm of just the sort which he might have expected. It was not acute; it implied no immediate danger; but it was symptomatic, corroborative. Elma woke tranquil and clear-headed from her convulsions, which had been totally unconscious. She said with a tired smile to her husband that she thought, after all, she wouldn't rise for an hour or two yet. But she had no inclination, as it turned out, to rise at all that day. Her father, brim-

ming with solicitude, came and sat beside her as long as she would sanction his presence. When dismissed he meekly retired, and kept repeatedly muttering to Moncrieffe that if he thought anything serious was going to happen he must have no hesitation about getting together two or three of the best and most famous doctors in Paris. Moncrieffe kept replying that if he had any fear of that kind he would undoubtedly consult other medical advice. He refrained from betraying a word of the truth to his father-in-law. "She may live for years," he thought, "and any statements I made might prove the idlest of monitions." At the same time, he felt it the wiser plan to seek out, that same afternoon, a certain American doctor who dwelt not far away, during a somewhat prolonged sleep into which Elma had fallen. He explained his diagnosis to this gentleman, whom he found both courteous and intelligent. He also found that he had not erred in his estimate of the malady with which his wife was afflicted.

"She may live for years," he again said to himself, as he returned to the hotel. "But the lesion exists—possibly it exists for none other than congenital causes, and explains many eccentricities whose origin was unguessed before. She has been a sick girl when she dreamed herself the healthiest. That infernal 'Bright's' has had her in its clutch, very possibly, since she was seventeen."

It pleased him, professionally, to think that he might wrestle with this distemper from a rel-

actively new standpoint, just as he had waged quiet combat with the illness of Mrs. Thirlwall. The physician with whom he had talked had strengthened, though not at all egotistically, his belief in his own powers and equipments. Their conversation had served to remind him how hard he had studied and thought before presuming to practice in Riverview. "I *can* keep her alive for years yet," he mused, while retracing his steps to the Rue de Rivoli, "provided the deadly thing doesn't take one of those leaps that no man of real science may presume to prophesy."

She was awake when he got back to her bedside, but not in the least reproachfully so, and she expressed herself as feeling strong enough to get up and dine with himself and her father. He had no difficulty in vetoing this impulse. She submitted to his counsels, and even fell asleep while he was imparting them. He would have preferred another effect than this drowsiness, but he had no hesitation in telling her father that it might bring for her a morrow of good results.

He would have gone to some theater that evening but for the presence of Blagdon, since Elma, watched by her sedulous maid, dozed on so quietly. But to dine with the old man was an obligation, and he met it in serene concession. Blagdon, for some reason, got to be garrulous on the subject of Riverview. Some things that he babbled hardly diverted the heed of his son-in-law from the excellent claret and the flavorful olives.

"I guess that railroad scheme, Basil, ain't going to get on for a year or two yet."

"Not for a year or two?" he answered, unaware of what he really said.

"No, *sir*. The directors have quarreled with the townspeople for about the tenth time, and the bill at Albany still hangs fire. It's that devilish graveyard business, you know."

"Graveyard business, eh?"

"Yes. There's some new trouble, now. It's the Smiths and the Curtises. They're kicking. They've both got vaults they don't want plowed up. They ain't any great shakes in Riverview, if it comes to that, but they've done a good deal of living and dying there for over a hundred years. They ain't swells, but they've got money, don't you understand, and they own an acre or two here and an acre or two there, just as the Thirlwalls do."

"The Thirlwalls?"

"Oh, *they're* willing enough to sell. *They* ain't kicking. They're hard up, you know, and I guess they'd be the first to settle if they only got a chance. . . And so you really think El may turn up bright and fresh to-morrow morning?" . . .

A week later Mr. and Mrs. Moncrieffe left Paris for Italy. Rome, when they got there, was sunnily cold, as it is so apt to be in the winter months. They spent a fortnight under the dome of St. Peter's before Blagdon joined them. Then they went with him to Naples, and there Blagdon expressed a desire to cross the

Mediterranean and get a glimpse of Algiers. Elma, now radiantly well, insisted that he should carry out this idea. She arranged, with quiet assertiveness, that he should spend a certain time in Africa and rejoin herself and husband in Vienna during the early weeks of spring. He obeyed her mandate, and after parting with him in the south of Europe they found him turning up, with pathetic punctuality, in Austria. Thence they repaired to Paris, when the chestnut-trees were whitely blossoming on the loveliest thoroughfare in the world.

A kind of peace had meanwhile clad Moncrieffe's days. Elma had often distressed him by her caprices, **but** never so harshly or obstinately that a **few** words of warning, of reprimand, did not work prompt effect.

But in Paris, revisited with indecision as to the homeward journey, a sharp change occurred. Moncrieffe got from their bankers a small budget of personal letters. These were brought him, as it chanced, in Elma's presence. While reading one from Whitewright he broke out into an exclamation of sorrow.

"Ill again, dear boy! But not like the last attack, thank God!"

Elma, who had been scanning a yellow-covered French novel, threw her book aside. "Read me the letter," she said. "Read it from first to last."

Moncrieffe resented her tone. It was touched with too authoritative an accent—one pregnant with reminders.

"I'll read you," he said, "what dear old Magnus tells me about—"

"Read it *all*," she commanded. "Begin at the beginning, and read every word."

"No," he said. "There are passages—" And then he paused.

"Passages about Eloise Thirlwall, no doubt!"

This was the first time in many weeks that he had heard her mention the name. "Ah, be careful!" he broke out, hardly knowing what he said or what he meant.

"Careful?" she echoed. "Of what? Is her name so sacred, then? Do I soil it by pronouncing it?" And she laughed a shrill, trenchant laugh.

All the rest of that day she was alternately cynical and morose. In the evening it had been arranged that they should go to the Français, where Mounet-Sully was to play in "*Ruy Blas*." Shortly after dinner she joined Moncrieffe where he stood before the dressing-glass in his own apartment.

"I don't care to go this evening," she said.

He laid down the brush with which he had been stroking the side-locks of his hair; and these had grown more than faintly frosted, by the way, since his marriage, young as he still was.

"You are well?" he asked.

"It isn't that."

"What is it, then?" he persisted. "What is it *this time*? Pure, unadulterated caprice?"

She lifted her small head high on its slim and

graceful throat. "You may call it what you please."

"Thanks; I will."

A curtness in his tones almost frightened her; she had had from him nothing like it till now. It was time to go to the theater; his overcoat lay on a chair, and he took it up. As he did so she said to him:

"You are going alone, then?"

"Yes," he replied. "Why not, since you will not accompany me?"

"I don't wish you to go alone."

He began to put on his overcoat. He felt, as her husband, very obdurate; but as her physician he was touched by thrills of indulgence, extenuation, even sympathy. Still, she had told him that she was not ill, and he now knew so intimately every shade of change in her face that he could not doubt the truth of this avowal.

"You did not wish me to 'go alone,'" he said, "once before, on a like occasion, in this very same hotel. I yielded to your desire then because you declared yourself, and quite truly, out of health. But this evening it is different. I shall not treat your whim seriously."

"You'll go then, without me?" she returned, under breath, with sparkling eyes.

"*With* you, Elma, if you choose."

"But I don't choose."

"Then I shall go alone."

"You'll — you'll disobey me, you mean! You'll—"

"*Disobey*?" he repeated, and went close to

her while he buttoned his overcoat with quick, nervous fingers. His face was set, and the color had wholly faded from it. "How dare you use such a word to me, Elma? How dare you even imply that I owe you the least obedience?"

"How—dare I?"

She gasped out the sentence, and then laughed mockingly. "Do you suppose I've forgotten you were the merest nobody when I married you? Do you suppose I've shut my eyes to the fact that my having stooped to marry you was a condescension for which you should always be grateful?"

Moncrieffe stood immovable for a few seconds. Then he reached out one hand and slowly took his hat from the near table. After that he lowered his head a little, and walked to the door, while Elma, seemingly rageful and palpitating, watched him.

XVI.

WITH a hand on the knob of the door, Moncrieffe paused. Then he spoke, and every word seemed to pierce the air like a pistol-shot, though his voice was not once unwontedly raised.

"I will never notice you again until you humbly beg my pardon for what you have said. And still more, I will never notice you again unless you add to your apology the admission that you uttered two falsehoods a moment ago. The first

in stating that I was the merest nobody when you married me; the second in stating that your having married me was a condescension for which I should always be grateful. I shall at once take quarters in another hotel, and will send for my luggage to-morrow. You shall have my new address, and can make such use of it as you may please. A steamer sails for America next Saturday, and if before then you have not conformed with my demands (I assure you they're quite unalterable) I shall be one of her passengers."

He immediately left the room, and soon afterward the hotel. He did not see Mounet-Sully that evening; he spent some time, instead, strolling along the boulevards, and later engaged a room at a charming little hotel called the Balmoral, in the Rue de Castiglione, almost opposite that in which his wife and his father-in-law still abode.

He felt very firm, though at the same time immeasurably grieved. Now and then, however, the physician in him became at odds with the man, and he recalled what he knew of that subtle, ineradicable disease lurking in Elma's body. He recalled, too, how his own skill had combated and kept it at bay, quite without her knowledge. Was she, after all, really responsible for the insolence and absurdity of her conduct?

Then the man, the outraged husband, insisted on *his* response. Admitting that her health was organically unsound and that her brain had been

subjected to its deteriorating spell, self-control was nevertheless a power within her reach. He had offered her the chance of atoning for that vulgar and cruel assault. If she refused this chance he would keep the very letter of his threat. And now he found himself hoping passionately that she would refuse the chance. For a long while he might not be free to marry Eloise, but he would achieve a liberty which had rather speedily grown to him more dear than all conceivable luxuries.

He had been at the Hotel Balmoral nearly a day when Blagdon appeared there. The old man looked humbled in spite of himself, and his civil bearing had a most factitious hint. "He would like to shake his cane over my head if he dared," thought Moncrieffe. "He's frightened half out of his wits, however, on *her* account. Above all things I don't wish to seem as if I were bullying him, for Heaven knows I have not the faintest wish either to do so or to seem so."

Blagdon began with a solemn little cough. "I got here as soon as I could after El told me about it, and that, I guess, wasn't more than a half-hour ago. You'd sent her your message this morning, and she'd had the baggage you wanted shipped here across the street to you, and I didn't know what was up, and couldn't get a word out of her for hours. All she'd do was to say . . ."

"Well?" Moncrieffe asked, as the speaker tilted his big round-topped walking-stick between two concave hands, after having grown abruptly silent. "All that she would do, I sup-

pose, Mr. Blagdon, was to say hard things about me and my cause of absence."

"Well—I guess you ain't very wrong there."

"What the hard things were I prefer not to learn. I prefer not to learn anything, if you please, except whether she will or will not yield to my commands."

"Commands, eh?"

"Commands—positive and unrelaxing. I've the right to call them so. If it were possible that I could speak to her as she spoke to me I would hold her requirements of apology in the light of commands. But it is not possible. However, let that pass. You came here, Mr. Blagdon, with your daughter's knowledge and sanction?"

"No—no. I came to—to try and get this thing straightened out, if I could."

"Straightened out?" . . . Moncrieffe smiled a little wearily as he repeated the words. "Only one person can perform such an office. She knows how. If by Saturday she has not done so I shall sail on the *Champagne*."

An oath, and a raw, hot one at that, leaped from Blagdon. His eyes were aflame with wrath as they met the tranquil look of his son-in-law. He bobbed up from his chair, with the walking-stick gripped crosswise against his stomach.

"You'll sail, eh? You'll sail?" he snarled. But these two quick questions were touched with an abrupt plaintiveness. "And—and what will you do when you've got to the other side?"

"Go and live again with my friend, Magnus Whitewright."

"Stay in Riverview?" he muttered, as if he were saying it to his own thoughts. "Leave your wife, but stay on in Riverview?"

"Not permanently, I think, Mr. Blagdon. But in no case would I ever return to The Terraces until— However," he broke off, with an iron inflexibility of manner, "what I did do or did not do would be quite my own affair. You have evidently come here—I read it in your face when you first presented yourself—with some sort of persuasive idea. No such idea could be made to prevail with me, however skillfully you conveyed it; and let me add, please, that your recent burst of bad language did not indicate either skill or taste."

Blagdon got up from his chair now, as if once and for all. His gray-fringed lips were trembling, and the red of his tongue slid out for a second, as if moisteningly, between them. "I—I guess that settles it," he stammered, huskily. "She won't give in. She told me pretty much what she said. P'aps it was worse than she told me." He snatched a handkerchief from his breast-pocket and crushed its folds against his forehead.

"Good God!" he suddenly blurted out, with what to his hearer meant a world of strange and savage pathos, "why can't you love her enough to let her play all the pranks she pleases? Why can't you love her as I do? *I* wouldn't care how she acted to me! *I* wouldn't *really* mind if she kicked me in the face—if she—"

He gulped down the next words and stood

glaring miserably at Moncrieffe, with the handkerchief making a white trail from one hand and the walking-stick obliquely dangling from the other. "And damn it all," he recommenced, "she cares more for your little finger than for my whole body, though I am her own father and give her a clean million as a weddin'-present!"

This appeal (if from one point of view almost ludicrously uncouth) could not fail to touch Moncrieffe. It did not alter his resolve, however, and he was about to say so with a candor as gentle as he could make it, when a sharp knock broke on the new stillness.

Moncrieffe went to the hall-door, but a step from where he stood. He opened it, and saw one of the hotel waiters. In another instant he saw his wife. She brushed past the waiter and swept quietly into the room.

"You're here, papa? I thought so. You must go. Please go at once. At once, I say, papa."

Her tones were singularly colorless, and not in the least high. She at once had her way with her father. It seemed to Moncrieffe as if only two or three seconds had sped on before he perceived her turn the key of the door and veer about, facing him, in a chamber where now they two stood quite alone.

Her locking of the door gave him an impulse to go and possess himself of the key which she had left there. It was hard to tell what act of desperate folly she might commit. But as he

moved a pace or two forward she flung herself at his feet.

"Forgive me this once, Basil! I'll say everything you told me I must say! I've been wrong—I've been horribly wrong and bad and mean! I never thought you a nobody; you were more like a god to me, Heaven knows! And I never thought I stooped in marrying you; it was you that lifted me to your level!"

She caught one of his hands in both her own, and showered kisses upon it—warm kisses, that were soon blended with warmer tears. Her face was touched by a peculiar yellowish pallor whose origin he could not now fail to know, and her imploring eyes looked up at him from little caverns of dusk.

"So, you have come to your senses, Elma?" he said, and raised her to his side, slipping his hands about her slender waist. "I'm glad of it, my dear—most glad!" . . .

She told him, a little while after the restoration of peace between them, that she had come to her senses in another way than the one to which he referred; and when he asked her what way it was, she replied that it concerned the immediate making of her will. She had never made it; she had never thought about it since the occasion on which her father had given her that grand *dot*. Then she had rather snubbed him for presuming to deal in any such grisly allusions at so gay a time. Now, however, she insisted that a certain American lawyer, resident in Paris, should be asked to draw up such a doc-

ument as quickly as possible. To this plan her father assented, and perhaps with the feeling that it would matter very little whether he assented or not. On finding that she had left to her husband every dollar of her million, he gave a great inward groan. Never again would Moncrieffe be a son-in-law after his own heart; he had forgiven the young man for handling his wife's father without gloves; but to manipulate in like manner the impertinence, even the imposition of that wife herself, was less easy of pardon. It was always humming through his brain that Moncrieffe ought to bear any sort of injury from Elma; and when he came to formulate this conviction and found it a phantom reflex of his own intense paternal prepossession and prejudice, the case was not mended in the least, and Moncrieffe seemed ungrateful, unhusbandlike, unchivalrous, just the same.

Still, he made no demurrer at his daughter's sweeping bequest. In the first place, to do so would have raised a tempest, and in the second place he felt quite equal to the idea of Moncrieffe as a widower millionaire if Elma should die before he did, provided this new reconciliation should bring lasting peace in its wake. And so the will was executed, and the legatee, conscious of his wife's expressed intent, knew nothing of its practical fulfillment. Blagdon did not doubt that Elma had told her husband she had made him her absolute heir. The old man longed for one grandchild at least, and confidently expected more than one. He did not look forward to his

own death for several years hence, he could not invest his volatile and energetic daughter with the possibility of dying till many years after himself. He had made his will, leaving every other million of his big fortune unreservedly to Elma. But of course there would be time to alter it if no children were born. And yet here, perhaps, coming years might set for him a snare. The potential childlessness of Elma must keep him on his guard. He shrank from the contingency which might put Moncrieffe into a future ownership of his entire fortune.

There had been talk, before that telling quarrel, of a long-continued stay in Europe. But Elma, though not at all dominatingly, had begun to speak of a homeward voyage. She was now in good apparent health; yet one watchful eye detected clearly the risk which might come to her from any other kind of life save that of thorough domestic repose. Touches of sweet and tender compliance marked every hour of her daily life. Never was repentance more seemingly sincere. She would take long walks and drives with her father, and treat him in such filial fashion that her smiles went to his doting old head like draughts of champagne. As for Moncrieffe, "I am falling in love with her all over again," he would tell himself; and then the afterthought would press upon him: "Have I ever really loved her, and is not this only a re-exertion (though perhaps quite unconscious on her part) of that same semi-physical, semi-psychical sorcery which mastered me months

ago?" She was meanwhile vivacious, witty, amusing, and amiable past all dream of cavil.

The truth was, two evil forces were now lulled in Elma's composition. One took its rise, long ago, from a training of reckless laxity. One was the product of that cloaked and sinister disease which an almost random flash of discovery had betrayed to Moncrieffe. Dread of losing her husband had combined with severe moral penitence for having assailed him in such atrocious terms. This mental betterment kept pace with a happier healthful state, and may indeed have helped to engender it. A century or two ago they would have said that her devil had been cast out, and given romantic reasons for his exorcism. Nowadays we have grown to think and speak of such personal domiciliary imps with a more prosaic, scientific and elucidating spirit.

Moncrieffe was not averse to sailing homeward during early June, and when Elma had declared her preference for such a plan the departure soon took place. For a day or two the voyage promised fine weather; then came a cyclone, fiercely violent, which kept the ship shuddering and tumbling for nearly five successive days. Moncrieffe was one of those sailors whom no amount of bad weather could disturb. Blagdon quickly succumbed. Elma, who was always a poor sailor, became very ill; then, on the second day of the storm, unconsciousness followed, and for several hours afterward she was at the point of death. The exhaustion of extreme seasickness

had wakened that slumbering viper of disease, giving it a chance now to make her body its easier prey.

No one on board the big, tossing steamer knew of this except Moncrieffe and the regular marine physician. There came for Elma's husband a certain fateful moment. It was just at nightfall; a day of weary rolling and reeling promised a still wearier night. He looked at Elma; her faint breathing gave little fluttered motions to her pinched and hueless nostrils, oddly like that palpitance we see in the gills of a gasping fish. He touched her forehead; it was icy. He took her temperature, forcing the small medical thermometer between her bluish lips.

"She is dying," he presently told himself. "Or, at least, her life hangs by a thread." And at this instant a pang of wild, unreasoning gladness darted through his breast. To do him plain justice, not the vaguest remembrance of money entered his thought, nor would any such remembrance have entered it if he had known of the making of that recent will in Paris. It was merely one swift and headlong sensation with him, as chainless, as impetuous, as those winds outside that were plowing great liquid valleys in the ocean beneath him and keeping the floor of the little stateroom at a continual distressful slant. *She was dying, and he had been glad.* No subsequent qualm of conscience could deaden the self-reproach of that reviewed emotion, quickly though his touch had sought the electric button at his side, and eager though he had found

himself to summon the physician of the ship. . . In another hour all danger had passed.

The weather quieted into a summer calm before port was reached. Elma did not leave her cabin until the last day out. Then she appeared on deck, weak and wofully pale. She kept speaking of how horrible her seasickness had been, and declaring that she would never cross again as long as she lived. Her father, who had wondered at her prolonged lassitude after the frightful storm had ceased, told her jokingly that she would forget all her miseries and be willing to sail again within a fortnight.

"You get it both from me and your mother, El. I'm bad in rough water, but your mother—she used to be knocked clean over if it blew on a ferry-boat going to Staten Island."

They went straight to Riverview, and found that The Terraces was in admirable form for their reception. The telegrams to the servants had acted like a clarion order to a well-drilled troop. Elma had been a martinet with the whole band of them in former days; they obeyed her in a good deal of fear, from housekeeper to stable-boy; but, after all was said, they liked her and had a very firm faith in her mercies, only wishing, at times, that these could be more securely calculable.

But neither they nor any mortal who came into contact with her could ever calculate upon Elma. As regarded her health, Moncrieffe had believed that he could safely do so. He had decided that she would probably be feeble and for-

lorn through the early part of the summer, and dreaded that heat of June which so often plagues the Hudson with almost torrid rigors. No sooner had his wife set foot within the fair and hospitable chambers of The Terraces, however, than she showed a phenomenal return of strength. She laughed at the idea of resting, when both her husband and her father proposed rest, on the day of her home-coming. She insisted on roaming about through the spacious mansion. She wanted to revise everything, to inquire about everything. "I never felt stronger," she kept saying. "Give me my head; don't oppose me." There was not a gleam of the old imperiousness in such words as these. And before long she laid her hand on Moncrieffe's arm, saying with a sudden sweetness which was part of the fascination she had always preserved for him:

"I know you're *wild* to see your dear friend, Whitewright. Now, don't bother about me. Go to him at once. And I only hope you'll find it far better with him than what I know your fears are prophesying."

"If she had always been like this," thought Moncrieffe, "I would never have forgotten how I love Eloise Thirlwall, but I would still never have missed a certain consolation for the savage accident that precipitated our marriage."

"Ain't she feeling splendid?" Blagdon murmured to him, a little later. "If she'd only go on like this I'd like to give a big ball to celebrate getting back again. It couldn't be *very* big, though, could it? There ain't enough high-

toned folks here for that. But I could just cram the house with flowers, and have ten more hired men than we've got, to stand round the halls and stairs, and a supper with wines that averaged six dollars a quart bottle—all the swell champagne brands, and Shatto Marga and Clowdivoorga and Rummanycontee, and all that. I'd make the papers send reporters down here, and they'd each give it a column afterward, you can bet. . . But there ain't any counting on El. She might be just as spry as she is now till the time came, and then fizzle right out. . . I mean in her health, o' course," he broke off, as if with some subtle apologetic deference. And then he added pensively, and in lowered voice: "Or she *might* take a tantrum, too. . . Anyhow, I guess it's best to let things keep quiet as they are. . . Don't you?"

"Decidedly yes," Moncrieffe answered. As he glanced at the old man's heavy face he saw that his eyes were humid with half-repressed tears. And he knew they were tears of joy, of exultation, since this idolizing parent believed fondly in the full-restored health and happiness of his child. . . What anguish would spring from the knowledge that death constantly overshadowed her, and at any moment might reach toward her the dark arm of his irresistible embrace

XVII.

FOR over an hour Whitewright had sat with his friend on the small and narrow piazza of the cottage which had lately been their common home. An exquisite June afternoon was deepening into twilight. The lilacs in the doorway had faded, but every breeze bore waftures of scent from the great syringa bushes, thick-sprinkled with starlike blossoms. Beyond the little ordinary gate curved the white road, plunging into a woodland whose greenery twinkled with vernal freshness, and leaving behind it a tender idyllic sense of departure, mystery, and quest.

"And so you've told me all, Basil?" said Whitewright, breaking a silence which may have lasted longer than either of them knew.

"Yes—all. I've kept nothing back, Magnus. Why should I—from *you*?"

Whitewright gave a short nod. "Well, it's come, then. Your harvest is being reaped already, my boy. Tares instead of wheat. It's too bad for a man like you. It's too damnably, devilishly bad!"

Moncrieffe answered with a look of surprise. "So you put it like that, Magnus? I thought you'd agree with me that I'd achieved a magnificent victory."

"If it lasted—yes. But how long *will* it last? Volcanic conditions are quiescent; the crater doesn't even smoke. When will the lava boil

forth from it again? In a year, a month, or a day?"

"You're consoling, certainly. And so you believe—"

"That the leopard will not change his spots? Of course I believe so. But what you tell me of her frail health holds forth to you a promise of future freedom."

"In God's name don't talk like that," said Moncrieffe, getting up from his chair and taking out his watch. "May she bury me and live fifty years afterward!"

"Live, you mean, to marry some other fellow and lead him a still livelier dance."

"Oh, yes, if you please—anything. As it is, Magnus" (he went up to his friend's chair and dropped one hand on his shoulder with gentle emphasis), "I'm very fairly contented, and have no grand ambitions about ever being more than this. My only hope is to remain no less unsatisfied with my present fate."

A queer sparkle, half humor and half satire, came into Whitewright's dusk eyes. His frame had grown a trifle thinner, but his pale, mobile face, with its tell-tale hollowness about either cheek, had not appreciably changed.

"How you damn your own happiness with faint praise, Basil!"

"Come, come; don't begin to scold me."

"You wish you were back here in this cozy and humble little shanty—I'd bet big that you do!"

"I haven't said it, and if I wished it I wouldn't

say it. . . How the time has rushed on since we began to talk! And what pleasure it's been to see you and hear your voice again! You've made up your mind, after all, that threatened men live long. Don't say you haven't. I've not heard a single burst from you of that old morbid good-humor, that cynical cheerfulness, that tombstone-shaped geniality."

They laughed together, for a moment, looking into one another's eyes. "You told me not to scold you, Basil, and I won't. But I'm tempted to—I'm tempted to!"

"Of course you are. For you won't believe that I couldn't help doing what I did, and that my case is only one of millions, and that the world is full of folk who can't help doing what they do."

"The world," Whitewright both smiled and frowned, "is full of persons with impassioned opinions. Life is the great objective mystery at which we're all gazing with our various-lensed telescopes. You tell yourself that your telescope is the true one; it reveals to you the victimization of the individual, and makes him a mere puppet, moved by invisible wires—"

"Not quite that, Magnus. I never said anything so arbitrary. But I did and do say—"

"Allow me, please, the privilege of making my own mistakes. It's one, dear Basil, that you declare your beloved 'destiny' is only too generous about conceding."

"Sarcasm, eh? Well, philosopher?"

"I tell myself that I see the mystery as it

should be seen—as a fortuitous combination of griefs and joys which we waste energy in bothering ourselves about any more than we can and must, since thousands and thousands of years will pass over this poor insignificant little planet, and heed no more the fact of our having once wept or smiled here than we now heed the fact of a lightning-bolt having killed some saurian invertebrate ages before the birth of history.”

“Well?”

“Your wife tells herself that she sees the mystery—”

“She doesn’t tell herself (pardon me) anything of the sort. She has no settled faith in her own views. She’s like a wisp of sea-weed, plastic and sensitive to every random current.”

“As you please. Her telescope, then, has a broken lens, which turns the mystery into a still more mysterious turmoil. . . With Mrs. Thirlwall it is wholly different. She finds in life nothing but an agony of disappointment, because she has searched in vain for signs of another life, immortal and beatific. . . With Eloise Thirlwall there’s an opposite effect altogether. She finds in the mystery a beautiful and comforting solution, expressible by the paradox that it cannot be solved at all except when the awakening and not the slumber of death shall brighten darkness and disentangle complexity. And so the whole multiformity confronts us. Who is right, who wrong? Who sees the straightest and deepest, who the crookedest and shallowest? Ah, that’s only another mystery, is it not?”

He glanced up at Moncrieffe, and found that his face was preoccupied, his air inattentive and absent. "Flattering, on my life, Basil! You're not listening to a word of all my wisdom. You've made me cast myself like a swine before pearls—to put it (ahem!) politely."

Moncrieffe replied in confused tones, like one startled out of a reverie. "You—you spoke of *her*, Magnus. I had wanted to ask you about her, and about her aunt as well. A certain reluctance kept me silent—a diffidence, a dread. She—is—well?"

"Yes. Quite well, I think."

"And Mrs. Thirlwall?"

"Not half so well as when you gave her your care. But that isn't all. Her son, Dunstan, is a perpetual trial to her. They say that since he lost all hopes of marrying the lady who is now Mrs. Basil Moncrieffe he has been harassing his poor mother with a project she shrinks from and resents. It is nothing more or less than the sale of Greendingle and the exchange of Riverview for New York. Of course, in one sense, Riverview *is* New York. But Dunstan wants a rented house on Fifth or Madison Avenue, or somewhere like that. His demands are agonizing to his mother."

"I see, I see," said Moncrieffe. He had turned pale. "And you learned this, Magnus, from—?"

"Mrs. Thirlwall herself. I may as well tell you that she's been an angel to me since you were away. I didn't care to mention her first; I wasn't sure of how much or how little *you*

might care—" He paused, and smiled up into his friend's face, and the smile had for its recipient subtle blendings of affection and regret.

"Yes, I understand. And you have seen a good deal of her during these past months?"

"Not so much. But she's looked me up. She's persisted in not forgetting me. She's been an angel to me, as I said."

"She's an angel to everybody—even to that unspeakable son, if he'd only realize it. You've gone at all to Greendingle?"

"No. She's dropped into the drug-store, dear soul, and made believe that she came there only to buy liniments and lotions. But when I was ill she came here, and her niece came once or twice, too. But *her* visits happened every day for a whole week."

"God bless her!"

"It was because of you that she came as much as because of me—more, perhaps, on your account, Basil."

"No, no. Don't say that."

"She's devotedly fond of you still." (That "still" stabbed Moncrieffe.) "I think she wanted me at Greendingle, but *he* has been there, off and on, nearly all the time, and I imagine she felt that he might be insolent, or at least smolderingly arrogant, to a poor village apothecary like myself."

"No—it wasn't that, Magnus. She knew that he knew I was your friend."

"Possibly. But she didn't ask me, and I was glad not to be placed in the posture of refusing,

for I should have refused. My strength isn't equal to any unusual draughts on it nowadays. It's all sunset with me, and not a particularly brilliant one, either. My sun is declining in gray-and-silver, not purple-and-gold. However, I didn't intend to spout picturesque moribund egotisms. . . . She got to speaking with great frankness. 'They say' with me really meant 'she says,' though of course customers that drift in to purchase porous-plasters and liver-pills often hold the privilege of gossiping profusely as a part of their gracious condescension in not going to the druggist two corners away. . . . In her pain, and perhaps in her pity and liking for me, the poor, dear lady has been lavishly confidential. 'There's no two ways about it' (as the primitive resident of Riverview remarks to me when he comes in for a half-ounce of peppermint and wants to talk fifty pounds of politics) Dunstan Thirlwall has been conducting himself like the cruelest of household ogres. He'd set his mind on your marrying Eloise—you know for what reason. And now that his fortune-hunt is thwarted, he proposes to live in town, where his slender purse can give him fresh and ampler fields of matrimonial exploit. But his mother knows very well that the sale of Greendingle would necessitate large expenditures with the money gained from it. The new railway-company are still dubious about buying it. Eventually they will buy it, and if the estate is sold now the next owner will probably reap huge profit. For the railway is bound to be run

through that very property, sooner or later. Hundreds of real-estate speculators would buy it now, just on this chance. But it isn't in the fashionable building district, you know; it would bring only a low price at present, under the hammer. Dunstan is tired of waiting for the railway people to act. With what he scoffingly calls the 'graveyard sentimentalists' it will, indeed, after all, be only a question of a large enough offer. Riverview will forget that the bones of its forefathers are buried in that desired segment of the cemetery. Mrs. Thirlwall, for her own part, thinks paramountly of poor Eloise. She doesn't want the property sold now, because from her widow's-income, which is also the full family income and is by no means a generous one, she hasn't yet saved enough dollars to place Eloise above want in case of her own death."

Moncrieffe, who had lowered his head, here lifted it. His voice was neither tremulous nor hoarse, but had the effect of quiet struggle to stay both firm and clear.

"And you mean, then, that Mrs. Thirlwall thinks a sale of Greendingle and a residence in some rented New York house might war upon those habits of *saving* which will be deliverance for Eloise at some later day?"

"Yes. As it stands, and as you doubtless know, her income is now absolutely her own. Dunstan has nothing except what she gives him, and at any minute she has the full legal right to withdraw the allowance at whose meagerness

he grumbles. But this fact only augments his irritation and impatience. It does more."

Whitewright's voice fell, and he leaned back in his chair with a deep, slow sigh.

"What more, Magnus?"

"It adds fuel to his hate of Eloise. He is keen enough to see the real motive of his mother's humane obstinacy."

"Poor girl! What a forlorn lot!"

"Neither she nor her aunt will call it so, as long as they can both live on together and find strength in their union. For Dunstan's bark, after all, is worse than his bite; indeed, he hasn't any real bite as yet; it's all a perpetual bark, harmless though discordant. *But if anything should happen to Mrs. Thirlwall!* . . . Ah, then he might become an incarnate persecution to Eloise! Then indeed she might tremble at the forlornness of her lot!"

No doubt the lovely evening landscape was a charmless blank to Moncrieffe, as he drove home by emerald pastures full of browsing cows, and huge wayside copses of flowering elder, and thickets of wild-rose where the blossoms thronged creamy and pink.

"If I could help her, if I could help her," he kept thinking. "If I could help them both!"

He was very far from being the poor village doctor now. He sat in an easy-rolling carriage, on the softest of cushions. It was an open carriage, and he could look up from the back seat on which he lounged, and see the speckless and modish liveries of the two men on the box. It

was all mightily different from the little one-horsed "light-wagon" in which he had driven, not long ago, over these very roads. And this truth must be believed of him, that he felt no pride, no self-gratulation, as so many other men of his age and worldly place must have felt. Insisting to himself, as he changelessly did, that his marriage had not been one of cold ambition, but that fate had pushed him into it, he had none of that shame which will pierce some self-serving spirits even when they have committed a bloodless and sordid act.

And yet, while certain carriages passed him, and he raised his hat to their inmates, he imagined the amused or scornful comments which his presence, here in this luxurious vehicle, would evoke. Once it was a relief to meet the Cassilis carriage. It stopped, and Mrs. Cassilis, superb in one of her best toilets, with the bought-and-paid-for Pinckney at her side, asked beamingly after Elma, and said she was so glad to see him back again, looking so very well. Pinckney Cassilis echoed her welcomes, and their modish equipage moved on. "At least *they* can't talk contemptuously of me behind my back," thought Moncrieffe.

But soon his mind reverted to Eloise and her aunt; and before he reached the great gray walls of The Terraces, looming between their full-foliaged chestnuts and hickories, he had said to himself again and again that he must and would go to Greendingle. He would go in the rôle of Mrs. Thirlwall's quondam doctor—why

not? She needed him; her health needed him. Had not Whitowright plainly declared so?

And then the chilling reminder came: How would Elma endure this idea? He recalled her silly outcry, so brief a while ago, in Paris. But Mrs. Thirlwall, her friend, her admiration? Would not the fact that she required his services prevent any return of that detestable contumacy? Besides, was not Elma's evil genius now permanently exiled? Had he not firmly and finally given it "notice to quit"? Had he not made it unflinchingly clear to her that the methods of Pinckney Cassilis were not his own? And then the demands of Eloise's aunt upon his mercy were also, beyond dispute, demands upon his dignity, courage and self-respect.

"These qualities have not failed me yet," he mused, "in my dealings with the woman I have married." Just then the carriage swept through the gateway of his father-in-law's beautiful and stately domain. "Nor shall they fail me hereafter," he added, with a silent bitterness ill-suited enough to the whispering cadences of the leafage and the silvery sheen of the great, proud river, viewed by enchanting glimpses beyond hawthorn houghs and velvet lapses of sun-dappled lawn.

XVIII.

HIS knowledge that Mrs. Thirlwall needed him in a professional sense would have gladdened the anxious heart of her niece if she had been made, that very evening, aware of it. For more than a month Eloise had noticed in her aunt signs of fitful yet decisive failure. Mrs. Thirlwall tried to conceal the truth, but vainly; the gaze that watched her was no less keen than loving.

Dunstan had been blamable for this change; so his cousin would often bitterly reflect. All through the winter he had been tormenting his mother to sell Greendingle. He had found a purchaser willing to give a fair cash sum for the estate, though of course any new month or week might make this offer seem absurdly small. The railway company, by altering apathy into action, might raise tenfold the present value of the family acres. Mrs. Thirlwall kept refusing, just as her son had kept insisting.

"You will not consent," he at length had grumbled, "because you are saving up two or three thousand a year for that girl."

"Dunstan," replied his mother, "you should not blame me if this were true. But I do not say that it is true." And she smothered a weary sigh.

"You've made a will," he sneered, "and I happen to know it. Lawyer Brookham told me as much, the other day."

"Ah, you've been making inquiries, then?"

"Why shouldn't I make inquiries?" he fumed.

"Did my father leave you this life-interest that you might hoard money from it for the gratification of your outside personal charities?"

Mrs. Thirlwall's voice shook a little as she next spoke. "Dunstan, my son, can you call provision for poor Eloise by so unfeeling a name?"

"Provision for poor Eloise!" he scoffed. "How about provision for me, the lawful heir to this property, and the son of the man who left you in charge of it?"

"Dunstan, let me say to you what I have already said more than once: If you did not treat Eloise with the hatred and avoidance that you show to her, I might not feel concerned in her future welfare when I am dead and gone. As it is, you have your allowance—five thousand dollars a year, and this home, freed from all expenses of living."

"Five thousand a year! A fine sum for a man in my position."

"It is more than I retain for the full household expenses. I am giving you more than half my actual income—more than half what I spend on Anita, myself, and the management of the property, as it now unhappily stands, taxes and all included."

A dull flash left Dunstan's eyes. "Anita,

indeed! Why lug in that chattering little atom of semi-idiocy?"

"Dunstan! she's your sister."

"But Eloise isn't my cousin, though you give her all the rights and claims of your own daughter."

Mrs. Thirlwall shook her graceful head, with a smile of irony and fatigue. "Ah, my boy, she takes to-day less out of the family income than would make the wages of a maid-servant."

"We ought to live in town," struck off Dunstan. "With the price I could get for this place we *might* live there. I'm sick of moping here like this. I might bring about the whole sale in a fortnight. It would mean four hundred and fifty thousand cash, which could be handsomely invested at five per cent and even more. We could rent a house in some nice street, and—"

"Stop, Dunstan. I know perfectly what you mean. My immediate income (for you must pardon me if I tell you that it still would remain mine, you know) would markedly increase. But that surplus—or the greater part of it—would be spent in idle pleasures by yourself."

"Idle pleasures? Am I a dissipated person, then?"

"Yes."

"You're insulting, mother."

"No, I am not. You *are* dissipated, Dunstan, and you know it. You may not be grossly so, but you are luxuriously and very selfishly

so. At my death you will have all; but until I die—”

“Until you die,” he shot out, with a harshness all the more brutal because bathed in surly semitone, “you will go on saving for that girl, who hasn’t the ghost of a claim upon this property, and whose mother—”

“Dunstan! Dunstan!” . . . Here Mrs. Thirlwall rose, quivering and horrified. “I entreat, I command you to be silent!”

And then he had flung himself out of the room, with scowls and mutters, and in a week or ten days, or perhaps even sooner, the same scene, more or less painful, had been repeated.

That winter Dunstan hated Riverview more than ever, for the reason that his position there as the defeated struggler for Elma Blagdon’s hand in marriage was now full to him of covert slurs and stings. In his social New York experiences the course was far more comforting. Here he moved among cliques that viewed with taken-for-granted languor all aims among unwedded members to marry at the most mundane of dictates. Meanwhile, he found himself less liked than formerly. Disappointment and defeat had blent his native cynicism with a more acid tincture. People of his own bent sought him less for their dinners and small reunions. He knew that he had lost the old art of amusing them by his insolence and indifference, leaven yet polished. Rage and mortification are imperiling to a fine repose, and, beyond question, he had bled from the darts of both. With

women, it has been said, strong emotions harm the complexion; with men, they disorder the manners. Dunstan had always prided himself on the perfection of his manners when occasion called him to exploit them. He kept them laid away, as it were, and yet ready for instant use. They certainly were effective in texture and fit. They were wrought, so to speak, like delicate chain-armor, of metallic little links and involutions; and, it must be owned, that they sometimes revealed an extraordinary suppleness. But now their tough yet pliant fabric was marred by dints and even rents as well. He had fallen into that fatal error for a man of fashion—he betrayed his resentments and spites. The truth was, a fierce and tenacious hatred had fastened upon him. He had urged his mother to sell the family property and leave Riverview, chiefly because the rural restraints of the place afflicted him with an unbounded boredom; but he was sensible, while he thus urged her, that the return of Dr. and Mrs. Moncrieffe to The Terraces would invest departure with added charm. It was in him to cherish grudges, and there were times when he knotted both hands in ugly waking dreams of personal conflict with this upstart usurping young doctor. His native good-sense kept telling him, all the while, that his only real assailant had been the infatuation of Elma herself. But Moncrieffe stood tangibly and loathsomely for his memorable repulse. In a way the haunt-

ing fact of this repulse deadened and paralyzed his matrimonial energies. He had been wounded in a very sensitive place—that of self-love and conceit. He had intended, for some time past, to make an enviably rich marriage; he belonged to a class of our youthful American “gentry” who regard honorable citizenship in that somewhat misty light and from that somewhat unsteady standpoint. But now he felt a chill through every fiber, a shock through every nerve. His town associates explained it all with secret giggles, of which he only divined the irritating echoes. A rich patent-medicine man’s daughter in Riverview had thrown him over for another fellow, and the whole business had got him into a devil of a rage. That was what he kept hearing them say, and the uncertainty as to whether they really said it or no made him watch for an ambushed sneer in smiles that he had not previously dreamed of analyzing. Some of these smiles were on lips feminine, and that made matters all the more provokingly worse.

He had his rooms in town, and through the recent winter would spend three or four days there without a glimpse of Greendingle. In proportion as his hate for Moncrieffe rankled, his old-time antipathy to Eloise increased. Her pathetic birth had never had for him the slightest pathos. It was simply an occurrence that should have been long ago smothered up and forgotten. His mother’s noble exposition of it struck him as needlessly and acutely vulgar.

Eloise was a family skeleton, and her proper place should have been a closet supplied with the discreetest of padlocks. She made people talk, and rake up an old scandal; she was a kind of living and breathing scandal herself. If she could have been got away by a quiet marriage with some such decent and obscure person as Moncrieffe, she would in a measure have ceased to reflect annoyingly upon the Thirlwall repute. She would have been a *femme couverte*, in that case; the skeleton would have been laid at last in that closet whence no heroic imprudence should have permitted it to emerge.

Nearly every time that he had gone to Riverview since Elma Blagdon's marriage he had marked his appearance there by a disputatious talk with his mother. Eloise had grown to dread his comings far worse than the rawest east wind that ever swept through the Hudson valley. But she had always held her peace, and refrained from an interference which she well knew would be drearily futile, and which might be dramatically so. Not that she cared if Dunstan should pelt her with insult, provided he ceased to fret and irk her aunt. But this continuous chafe and strain were telling so upon Mrs. Thirlwall that the girl feared to be out of her presence, lest some sudden affrighting news should re-summon her there.

Dunstan was at Riverview, it chanced, on the day that the Moncrieffes returned. He had driven that afternoon to the village, and some

one there had told him the news. Meanwhile, Eloise had learned it from Mrs. Bellchambers, who had dropped in at Greendingle just before obtaining it from Heaven knew whom. This lady did not see Mrs. Thirlwall, for she was lying down at the time of the visit. Not that she was ill, Eloise explained, but that she found herself rather oddly and unaccountably tired. And Mrs. Bellchambers went home, and held a talk that evening with her husband.

"The poor dear thing has heart-disease, you know, Frederick. I'm *so* fond of her, and no doctor ever did her the faintest good but Dr. Moncrieffe."

It was nearly dinner-time, and Mr. Bellchambers felt in a cheerful mood. To-day he was going to permit himself one boiled potato, as a most exceptional luxury, and he sniffed the air, at intervals, as though he smelt it boiling. "And now that Moncrieffe is back again," he said, "why shouldn't she ask him to go on prescribing for her? In a friendly way, of course. He's a good fellow, as I've always insisted, and his change of fortune would never harden him into any state of paltry pride."

Mrs. Bellchambers primly compressed her lips. "I don't know what a 'good fellow' means. We women have never been able to master the depth and subtlety of that term; we have to take its definition on trust whenever the superior wisdom of you men confronts us with it. But I think I *do* know what a heartless trifler means."

"Oh, you will have it that *he's* one."

"Basil Moncrieffe had his choice to marry for love or for lucre, and made his choice. Well, I don't blame him on *that* score. You men are always—"

"We men are always bad lots, my dear, when we've the option between vice and virtue. I'm familiar with your view of us."

"Frederick!"

"Oh, yes, you really compel me to wail a little under the goad of your contempt for my sex. But how about Elma Blagdon having distinctly 'fetched' Moncrieffe, as the current phrase runs?"

"'Fetched' him? Her money did that." And here Mrs. Bellchambers became as one panoplied with the most impregnable conviction. "Don't tell *me*, please, that he could ever have preferred Elma to Eloise Thirlwall. You might as well say that I'd prefer a prickly weed to a Jacqueminot rose. And you ask me why Basil Moncrieffe shouldn't go on prescribing for his former patient in a friendly way. Have you forgotten that Dunstan is there at Greendingle, no doubt burning with the most dismal resentment and disgust? A fine surrounding for Dr. Moncrieffe, if he should venture in it—even though the voice of distress called him!"

Such a voice seemed to call him now, in the ears of Eloise. During dinner little Anita nestled at her side, repressed into big-eyed silence by the presence of her brother. . Mrs. Thirl-

wall, weak and artificially buoyant, talked of everything, of nothing. At length, just before dessert, she rose a little unsteadily, and said in a wavering voice,

"Come with mamma, Nita. She'll lie down for a while on the lounge in the sitting-room and tell you a story. But if she's too tired to end it you must let Cousin Eloise do that, some time between then and your hour for bed."

Alone with Dunstan, a little later, Eloise felt the air of the dining-room weigh on every movement she made, thicken every breath she drew. Dunstan rarely spoke to her, rarely gave her even a sign that he was conscious of her presence. She knew that her aunt would not have gone away like this if stringent inertia (following a repast of which she had eaten with tell-tale languor) had not almost pushed her from the table.

"She does not like to leave me with Dunstan any more than I like to be left alone with him," thought Eloise. "And yet, after all, it's fortunate. It gives me my chance."

The servant had retired. The two cousins sat opposite one another. Eloise glanced across the table while she stirred her small cup of coffee with its small post-prandial spoon.

Dunstan was coolly peeling an orange. His eyes were fixed on his plate.

"Aunt is not well. She's not at all well," Eloise said.

He looked up, but did not meet her eyes. She saw in his, however, the old apathetic disdain.

"I haven't noticed that her health is worse than usual."

"It is decidedly worse." Nerving herself, Eloise went straight to the point. "And old Dr. Bascomb, who has got well enough to attend her now and then, does her no good. Neither does his new associate, Dr. Parkley. There is no one who has ever done her any good except Dr. Moncrieffe. He returned to-day from Europe, and I want her to see him."

Dunstan looked her full in the eyes. Then, after a kind of flurried, swimming glance to left and right, packed with constrained ire, he dropped the half-peeled orange upon his plate, and rose.

"Have you so little dignity as to try and use this miserable makeshift for seeing again the man who jilted you?"

"Jilted me, Dunstan?"

"Threw you over—tossed you aside like an old glove," he persisted, white to his lips, which were scornfully curled.

Eloise smiled pityingly. Her eyes closed for a second, and a visible shiver crept through her frame. Then her wrath rose, and she with it, and while passing from her seat at the table and clutching the back of her chair, she haughtily retorted:

"It is false that Dr. Moncrieffe ever did what you say. It is false that he ever spoke to me a single word to justify your shameful sneer. If you are thinking of what Elma Blagdon, his wife, did to *you*—"

"Be careful!"

He swept round to her and faced her. But she did not recoil a step from his stormy brows and clenched hands. She felt very desperate, yet was unaware if she were brave or meek; she simply acted out the human challenge his brutality had roused in her.

"You hate Dr. Moncrieffe because he married the woman you wanted to marry. You tried to prevent him from becoming Elma's husband by a course of action toward me that was grossly cruel and unjust. I shall not 'be careful,' as you call it, any longer. If you were to strike me it would be an act of cowardice that would fittingly end all the unmanly treatment I've for years been forced to bear from you."

"If I were to strike you, eh?" he scoffed. "I don't strike women, no matter how they may choose to offend me by their cheap insolence. If you'd a shred of real self-respect you wouldn't propose that this fellow should enter these doors."

"Even though I lost self-respect by asking him to come," Eloise cried, with cheeks and eyes enkindled, "I would gladly pay that and a still heavier price to bring poor Aunt Emily the least needed help."

Dunstan thrust both hands into the side-pockets of his evening short-coat, and sauntered past her with high-held head.

"Oh, of course," he muttered, "you naturally should feel grateful to the lady who permits you *to call her your aunt.*"

He at once quitted the room after having delivered himself of this highly noble response. Eloise stood with bowed head for a brief while, plainly trembling. This was not the first time she had received from the same hand a craven little dagger-thrust. In other days they had been dealt her with just the same mean, abrupt malice. She wiped from her eyes the flooding tears. Then slowly, and with a lovely, unconscious defiance, she lifted her head.

"I should be used," she thought, "to that old jibe of his about my birth. There's novelty, though, in his attack on my self-respect. . . Well, I've got from him just the heartless rebuff I might have expected. But at least he knows that I think Basil Moncrieffe ought to see Aunt Emily. I've broken the ice, in that way, just as I'd resolved to do. Now I'll find means to tell Moncrieffe that she's ill and needs him. I'll either write or I'll go boldly to The Terraces. It will be hard to do either, but one or the other I will do. . . He never threw me over; he never tossed me aside like an old glove. He didn't care for me as I cared for him: Elma fascinated him, and—he married her. He married her half because she put it in his power to ask her pointblank, and half because he loved her well enough to have asked her, if she'd been poor and a nobody like me, without any incentive but his own dominating passion. It was all authentic and sincere with him! I'm certain of that! I should be certain of it till his own lips told me otherwise!

I could never believe he *sold himself*. Aunt Emily doesn't believe it, but if she did I wouldn't. For I know in my inmost soul that though he might yield to a sentiment his higher nature thought shabbily of, he would never stoop to an act that would taint the sacredness of the marriage-tie with smirches of mere money-getting greed."

These reflections left her stronger. She was a girl in whom fortitude, faith, constancy, were always acting with an elixir-like energy of reparation. No amount of disaster would ever quite have quelled her, and real despair was impossible to her temperament. Or, if despair came, it at once began to rebuild a kind of contentment out of its own ruin. She had endured Dunstan with a good deal of quiet heroism for a long time. She was both repressing and wiping away her tears while telling herself that his worst abusiveness would prove practically harmless enough, so long as her aunt's life stayed, protective and defensive, between her own and his, when a treble voice, shrill and tenuous, rang out at her side.

"You're crying, Cousin Eloise, and I know who made you cry. He's gone out on the lawn, looking oh, so mad! I'm so glad he didn't hit you, or anything like that."

She caught up the little featherweight body of Anita, and pressed her lips against the odd, child-woman's face.

"You mustn't say such things, Nita. You mustn't even think them. Why did you leave

mamma? I thought you would stay with her."

"She fell asleep on the lounge. She dozed right off while she was telling me a story—not a nice one a bit, either. She didn't tell it right. . . Is she going to be just as she was when Dr. Moncrieffe came? Oh, I hope not! And is he so far away that he can't be sent for?"

"Not so far—not so far," said Eloise, hardly knowing that she spoke the words aloud.

Soon she had carried Anita into the sitting-room where Mrs. Thirlwall lay. Her sleep was only a light one; she awoke as her niece paused by the lounge.

"Are you still so tired, aunt?"

"No; just this short nap has refreshed me. . . . Why, Eloise! what is it? You're as pale as death, dear! Has Dunstan—?"

"Now, lie still, aunt." Eloise sank on her knees beside the lounge, clasping one of the hands that her kinswoman had frightenedly outstretched. "Lie still and I'll tell you everything. It isn't much. *He* doesn't want Dr. Moncrieffe to come here, and *I* do. That's about all."

She went on, for merciful reasons making the late quarrel seem an almost every-day commonplace beside those actual facts of it which had so shaken and wrung her.

"My dear child," at length said Mrs. Thirlwall, "you might have known he would hate your idea as deeply as he hates the man himself."

But don't bother about my health. If I really require Dr. Moncrieffe I'll send him a line, and take the risk of Dunstan's wrath. A few more of his frowns won't count."

But this did not satisfy Eloise. She had watched her aunt warily for days, and she knew that the old complaint was regaining sinister vitality, like a serpent that slowly uncoils from its lair. Who knew at what minute might come the deadly leap, the buried fangs? For her own part, a few more of Dunstan's frowns did not count, either. No, nor would his curses and blows (if he should so far soil his ideal of a "gentleman") keep her from serving the woman whose noble rescue, years ago, had spared her a life of ignorance, penury and possible vileness.

Not far away, at this same moment, Basil Moncrieffe was also resolving that no opposition on his wife's part should ever keep him from visiting Mrs. Thirlwall and aiding her by every kind of ministrant effort.

He dreaded to approach Elma on the subject. She was full of the breeziest geniality; she had received him on his return with the blithest of smiles and a declaration that he had disappointed her most agreeably in not having kept dinner waiting. "Did you expect that I would be late?" he asked.

"Oh, yes—shamefully. I knew that you would have lots to say to your beloved Magnus."

"I did have lots to say."

"And is he well?" she asked, with a solicitude so clad in sweetness that it gave him the impulse to snatch up one of her hands and press it against his lips.

"He will never be well, you know. But he holds his own fairly. I had the encouragement of finding him in as good form as I dared to expect. That meant a good deal of solid cheer to me, as you may suppose."

"Of course—of course. How nice! You must take me to him. We will go together soon. Or I will go alone. I will go and talk with him about you."

"Talk with him about himself, Elma. Tell him he looks better, whether you think so or not."

"But you've often said that he's reconciled himself to dying—that he waits for the end with a splendid philosophic indifference."

"True. I can't take that back."

She fingered at a button on her husband's coat. "I dare say you spoke with him about me." Then she lifted her drooped eyes, which brimmed with a kind of penitent vividness. "Did you tell him how bad I've been?"

"I told him, Elma . . ."

"Well, well?" she exclaimed, breaking into a soft laugh. "Why do you hesitate?"

"*Did* I hesitate?—I told him how charming you are, and in what contagiously joyful spirits."

Her look searched his face for a second.

"You're not in very joyful spirits yourself,

- Basil. Don't deny it. You can't fool me, dear, any more than if I were a sprained ankle."

"Allow me to resent that simile, Elma."

"Do, if you please. I'll rejoice in your amiable protest. But—what is it, Basil?" Her face, wreathed in smiles, had never been more winsome. "This time it isn't my fault, is it?"

He kissed her on the forehead, stroking her hair with both hands.

"No. Perhaps, if it is at all, it's seeing poor old Magnus again, and—"

"I understand! I understand! How you care for him, and how I love to have you care for him!"

He let both hands fondly slide along the lines of her shoulders and arms. "I must speak it out," he meditated; "I must speak it right out, bold and clear. I must tell her that I'm going there to-morrow. God help us both if the reference to Eloise brings on another phase of rebellious folly!"

His hands crept about either of hers, and his eyes riveted themselves on her own uplifted and glistening gaze. Her mood tempted his procrastination, his reluctance. It was like something delicate and symmetric and curvilinear, that a single stroke could destroy. He hated to deal the stroke, but not to do so would have been contemptibly to compromise with his own finer manhood. And to do so was like obeying fate itself. Therefore he at once spoke.

XIX.

To his surprise, when he had ended, she was slowly shaking her head from side to side, with an air redolent of sympathy.

"And that lovely Mrs. Thirlwall misses your medical aid? She *is*, Basil, without any exception, the loveliest woman I've ever met. You must go to her. You must go to-morrow morning."

"I'm glad you feel that way, Elma."

"Feel that way? Oh, Basil, how otherwise *could* I feel?" She tapped her lowered forehead, for a minute, with one hand. "Why shouldn't we go *together*," she suddenly burst out—"at least on your first visit?"

Moncrieffe gave the most incredulous of starts. "Together? You're not joking, Elma?" The unexpected had been happening with such pell-mell speed that he began to have an awful, insidious doubt of its true quality. What if she were only shamming with a kind of composed hysteria that would suddenly break its crust of calm artifice and spout forth a lava-stream, frenetic with jealousy of poor Eloise?

But, no. . . "Joking?" she queried, puzzledly. And then, as if doubt had died: "Oh, you mean *Dunstan*? But you forget, Basil, that he came to our wedding."

"So he did," murmured Moncrieffe, in a bland torpor of amazement.

It seemed like a dream to him, the next day, when he and Elma entered their carriage and were driven along bosky and undulant roads back into the country to Greendingle. The morning was full of silver-gray clouds, and the verdure, in its bounty and ubiquity, took an intenser accent of tinting, a luxurious rawness of green. It was June in another mood, with a pout on her lips that could not steal the enticement from their freshness and balm.

As the carriage passed into the Thirlwall lawns Dunstan chanced to see it without himself being seen. A cluster of cedars on a side path hid him from view, and luckily, for he both staggered and scowled. The carriage was of the victoria pattern; there were two neat-liveried men on the box; the trappings of the horses were showy but tasteful. There sat the man he hated beside the woman he had tried to marry. The wave of detestation that swept over Dunstan dizzied and almost nauseated him. He never forgot that implacable moment, through all his after life. To natures that cannot love loftily depths of hatred are often baleful compensations for this deficiency. There were times, through Dunstan's future experience, when he criticised his own hatred as vehement in a plebeian sense. He took it up and eyed it and handled it, so to speak; but he never threw it away as a valueless possession. He always put it back again in his pocket—that capacious pocket of our egotism, which is so elastic and commodious for the deposition of evil wishes and intents. Those few

minutes of sickening rage on the lawn of Greendingle made upon him an ineffaceable impress. He thought Moncrieffe's triumph superb; he would almost have given a decade out of his lifetime to accomplish anything in the same vein so malignantly perfect, so hideously complete. But this very admiration cast over his soul an inky shadow. Its gloom was the darkness of an unpropitiable loathing.

The coming of the Moncrieffes almost stunned Eloise. She had begun three notes, that very morning, to Basil, and had torn them all up. And now, as if by a very somersault of circumstance, here she and her aunt sat in painfully formal converse with these two most unexpected guests!

But Elma soon shattered formality. She left her seat, which was at some distance from Eloise, and took another, close at the girl's side. Holding one of Eloise's hands, she motioned for her husband to go nearer Mrs. Thirlwall, and then supplemented this gesture by words full of fiery sweetness.

"I know you and your former patient have lots to say to one another, Basil. But don't forget to tell her that now you're back in Riverview you're just as much her doctor as you once were. And make the dear thing understand that you'll come here every day if she wants you. Oh, Basil's heard!" (This with a shaken finger at Mrs. Thirlwall.) "His friend, Magnus White-wright, has told him! You're *not* as well as you look. He did wonders for you once, and

he's going to do them again! Aren't you, Basil?"

Without waiting for an answer, she suddenly rose and in a smiling way forced Eloise from her seat by the hand that she still clasped. "Come," she rattled on, "let's leave them together for a talk. We'll go out on the piazza a while—or on the lawn, if you will. It's so pretty and wild, here—so different from The Terraces, where everything is tended and trimmed and clipped half to death. . . Come, won't you?"

"Most willingly," said Eloise. Her heart was so full of gratitude, now, at the prospective medical counselings of Moncrieffe, that she could have kissed Elma to show it. And besides, she had never disliked this woman who had married the man she loved. It was hard for Eloise to dislike any one. She had her indignations, her antipathies, her revolts; but personal feminine rancors lost themselves in the largeness of her nature. It could no more accommodate them with definiteness than the mountain-gorge into which one casts a pebble.

She felt a little embarrassed when she had snatched a hat and wrap from familiar nooks in a hall-closet and gone out with Elma into the rather crisp air of this cloudy June day. But Mrs. Moncrieffe's very volatility and garrulity soon in part restored her ease.

"Do you know, I just hungered to have my husband come over and see your aunt when I heard that she wasn't so well again?"

"That was very kind of you, Mrs. Moncrieffe."

"Doesn't it sound queer, that 'Mrs. Moncrieffe'? I somehow *can't* get used to it. . . You're looking well." And she turned upon Eloise one of those amiable sidelong glances with which women mask the sharpest scrutiny of each other. "Are you?"

"I'm quite well, thanks."

"And your cousin—er—Dunstan, you know. Is he here or in town just now?"

"He's here. But he went out for a stroll a little while ago. Perhaps he may return before you leave."

"I hope he will," said Elma, with a sort of colorless affability. "I should like to see him again. I merely shook hands with him, as it were, on the day of my wedding. He was like everybody else, that day, a phantom that came and went."

"You mean you were excited?" Eloise rather timidly replied.

"Oh, that's no name for it! And yet I was outwardly as *calm*! You've never been married. You don't know how the ceremony and all the bustle make one feel. But you will marry before long. Of course you will."

"I?"

"Why not? You're of the marrying kind; I'm sure you are." They had got out on the lawn, by this time, and Elma paused at the door of a little summer-house which was one tangle of creepers. She pointed with her parasol into the sweet, shaded interior, whose rustic circular seat seemed to wait the occupancy of some

idler, with a book to be read and mused upon amid the green-glimmering gloom.

"Now, there!" she softly exclaimed. "That just expresses the peace and poetry which you should have in your marriage. I somehow see in your face, whenever I watch it closely, that you're fitted for the loveliest and most domestic of lots."

Eloise, coloring, answered: "Oh, I should say no woman could ever be happy as a wife unless she found both peace and poetry in her marriage."

Elma reached out one of her long-gloved hands and picked a leaf from the fluttering maze of greenery at her side. She began slowly to tear the leaf to pieces while she said:

"It ought to be like that with every woman. I believe it would be like that with you." She flung away the last fragment of the leaf and faced Eloise abruptly. "I'm going to say something to you that I'm afraid you won't like. But I can't help saying it. And—it's this: I—I always feel, somehow, as if you might have made him a thousand-times better wife than I ever have done or ever could do."

Eloise receded a step or two. She looked distressed; her eyes were sparkling troublously. "What a strange thing for you to tell me!" she faltered.

"I'm always telling everybody strange things. I've gone through life that way." Elma gave a little elfish sort of laugh, now, that died suddenly, at high pitch, as if some aggressive sound had cut it short there. "And I could tell you

stranger things than that," she hurried on, with feverish precipitation. "I could tell you that I sometimes reproach myself horribly for not letting matters work themselves out—for nipping events in the bud—for producing violent climax instead of being permissive and submissive as concerned the acceptance of natural, human, unmolested results. . . Is this clear? No? Well, I can make it clearer, then. I can—"

"Don't!" dropped from Eloise. She raised a hand, as if in warning and entreaty. Her face was aflame, and there were little tremors at the softest part of her throat, just under the rounded yet firm-carved chin.

"You don't want me to speak another word on the subject!" cried Elma, again laughing oddly. "And yet I see that you *do* understand me, wondrously well. . . Bah!" she broke off, with a random wave of her parasol in the air, "how could you fail to? He liked you enormously, and you knew it. Of course you knew it. You're a woman, and you must have had it all by heart long before he concluded to let me marry him."

"Mrs. Moncrieffe!"

But Elma dashed on. "How pretty you are when you blush like that! I wish I could ever be so pretty. You're—you're such a *woman*! I often think I'm half mannish in my style; I haven't that femininity of yours, tender yet strong. I envied it in you from the first. For I used to be fearfully jealous of you, you know—or perhaps you're too high-minded ever to have known."

"Oh, please don't speak like this."

"I will—I will! I repeat it; I feel cruel, and I repeat it, Eloise Thirlwall. I used to be fearfully jealous of you."

"Mrs. Moncrieffe—"

"I'm jealous of you still! I mean—at times. . . Now and then I think there's a sort of witch-like clairvoyance in me that tells me I'd have been a million-fold happier if I'd never had. . . But *will* you tell me something? *Will* you?" She caught Eloise by the wrist, not rudely, but with excited force. "I'm *sure* of one thing—that he liked you ever so much. But did he ever make love to you? Did he? did he? Are you angry at me? I don't care if you are. But *did* he? *did* he?"

Eloise snatched her hand away. She had now that air of dignity and wholesome pride which a woman of well-ordered temperament and character will always show in contrast to the hysterical addresses of one less sanely balanced.

"No."

She answered with decision and without ire, though not by any means tranquilly. And in another moment she passed away, leaving her companion to stare after her, at the door of the leaf-muffled summer-house, with a smile as bitter, as tragic, as ridiculously triumphant as was her own wayward, insoluble nature.

XX.

ELOISE moved quickly on. She was so shocked and wounded that it made her dizzy to think, and once or twice the lilacs and flowering almonds looked to her as if they were dancing mazourkas and quadrilles. She had got a good distance from the summer-house, following a bend in the pathway, when at last she paused, being deeply flushed and somewhat out of breath. In another instant Elma came hurrying after her.

"Oh, do forgive me—please do!" she cried. "I was idiotic; I know it; I realize it. And if you do forgive me, you'll keep my nonsense a secret, will you not? Say that you will! Please say that you will!"

Here she kissed Eloise on each burning cheek, and began to press and earnestly shake the two hands that she had seized, bending over them as one will do in earnest farewell or welcome. . .

At this same moment Moncrieffe, seated beside Mrs. Thirlwall, was saying:

"There *is* a change in you. But I am very hopeful as to certain new remedies, concerning which I both read and heard in Paris. I'll keep a steady watch on you; I'll come three times a week at the very least—and oftener if I'm wanted."

"But you're not practicing again. Or have you concluded that you must practice?"

"Oh, no. Elma would not hear of it. At least I imagine not. She was very downright, before our marriage, in her desire that I should quite give up my profession."

"Then this is all out of kindness. How good of you, and how like you!" Her violet eyes were sparkling, and her large, full-lipped, matronly mouth bubbled over with her own peculiar lovable smile, that glimpsed the fresh rows of perfect teeth. There had always been something about this woman that Moncrieffe revered, and his reverence had always been mingled with an affection of that tender type which holds in it the tinges of ardent sentiment as a twilight will retain those of bounteous day.

"Don't call it 'good,'" he said. "It's merely a natural act, like eating one's breakfast."

"Sometimes one hasn't much actual appetite for one's breakfast."

"You shall have yours restored to you. I'm going to bring it back again."

"And you're coming—as often—as that?" Her words were delivered lingeringly, with an accent of sweet surprise.

"Can't I come if I want?" he said, with a light, mock-irritated shrug.

"What a question! But suppose. . ."

"Suppose Dunstan should be odious again? Do you mean that he may be?"

"No. Not openly. Dunstan's darker side is rarely shown to the outward world, and of this he would rank you as a part."

"Well, then? There's no other objection to

my coming, is there?—to my constantly watching and caring for you?”

“None,” said Mrs. Thirlwall, below her breath, while she laid a hand on his arm, the very gentleness of her touch harmonizing inexplicably with the fervor of search in her eyes. “None, my dear boy, unless your wife should—protest.”

“Protest? Elma? Why, she’s here with me to-day. You saw that. She wished to come. I brought her at her own request.”

Mrs. Thirlwall gravely nodded several times. “But will she wish to come every day, when you do?”

“No. Of course not.” Their eyes had met; he dropped his before he again spoke. “And if she doesn’t?”

There was now a silence between them. Startlingly the lady broke it. “Basil Moncrieffe, when you married your wife you were in love with Eloise.”

“Ah! You tell me so!” broke from him, in aggrieved undertone.

“You remember that I told you so once before? I had felt it—divined it. And as for you, my friend, you did not then deny it. If—if everything is altered now, I shall be more than glad. Make it clear to me, will you, whether everything *is* altered or not?”

He drew himself up a little, not offendedly, but with a certain plain sternness. “My dear lady, I am as happy as I deserve to be.”

“Ah, that’s ambiguous,” she murmured. “We all deserve to be happy, from one point of

view. Believe me, if you have still any of that old feeling for Eloise it would be better that I should never profit by these visits with which you so generously propose to aid me! There would be danger—danger!” And she bowed her head, faintly shivering.

“Danger!” he cried. “What! to her from me?”

“To both of you from one another.”

“You’re sure, then, that Eloise—?”

“I’m no more sure of Eloise’s heart than you are. If she had ever cared for you, if she cared for you still, she would rather die than disclose it.”

“Even to you?”

“Even to me—unless I sought to wring it from her, which I should never do.”

“Content yourself,” he announced, rather curtly, after a pause. “I’m a staid old married man, now.”

“And securely, satisfyingly, in love with your wife?”

“Ah, what a question to put any man! If your Eloise were Héloise, and I, her Abelard, had wedded her, wouldn’t it be perilous, even a few months after wedlock, to demand the answer to a question so radical?”

“Come, come; I know that tone of evasive levity. Recollect that you’re talking to a world-worn old woman.”

“You must pardon me if I plead forgetfulness of any such fact.”

“*Gallantry* will not serve you to masquerade

in," she said, with a lifted forefinger. "But I won't beg confidences. I recall how men hate a woman's curiosity."

"Some men hate some women's. I could never hate yours."

"You mean you'll tolerate it, my dear boy, but you won't gratify it."

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, with a restive gesture, "do you want me to acknowledge that I married Elma for her money?"

She gave a hurt start. "I've always believed you did not. I've always believed that she married you because she passionately loved you."

He smiled with grimness. "And I hope you've said that to these carping, gossiping folk here in Riverview whenever you had a chance to stand up for me. It wouldn't have been the truth, but it would have been better than to have them unmolestedly denounce me as a second-hand Pinckney Cassilis. The truth is," he pursued, with somber heat, "that I've never *told* you the truth. I've never told you that I went to The Terraces on the night I became engaged to Elma, with a letter in my pocket asking Eloise to marry me." He spoke right on, after that, and left nothing unconfessed. Every past torment of his brief married life he laid bare. Then he spoke, with a certain tone of tepid comfort, about his wife's present reformatory change. "God knows how long it will last," he ended, or seemed to end. In another second he broke forth again, however. "I don't know if I've

made it clear to you that I could not do otherwise than I did."

"Could not?" she repeated, not incredulously, yet wonderingly.

"Could not! A power outside of myself was at work. There is always such a power outside of ourselves. Sometimes it leaves us unscathed, or seems to leave us, for years at a stretch. In my case it gripped me and flung me down, like an athlete of thrice my weight and skill. It's Tennyson, isn't it, who sings of the 'wrestling thews that threw the world'? Ah, that wasn't one of his wise lines; it was merely brilliant and showy. . . Don't you grant I'm right? You pitied me, you were exquisite in your sympathy, when I spoke of my engagement that morning, just after its toils had got their tangle round me. You thought me a kind of erring fellow-creature, then, and your big heart went out to me in forgiveness. Does not your big brain see now that I did nothing to be forgiven *for*?"

She looked at him steadily. "It sees that the woman who got you is an unwomanly vixen. That's mild, but I'm not good at calling names, so let it suffice for vituperation. I thought her wild, eccentric, at times outwardly Amazonian, even; but I never dreamed she could trail her maidenly self-respect so piteously in the dirt!"

Moncrieffe drew back, while the color surged to his temples. "I—I've defended myself," he stammered, "too recklessly. I should have spared *her*; I—"

"She did not spare you—nor Eloise, either!" rang from Mrs. Thirlwall, and more resentfully than he remembered ever to have heard her speak. "But have no fear," she went on, with voice promptly mellowing into its native music. "Your confidences shall remain inviolate. Still, you must not come here as my physician. After what you have told me I dare not let you come."

"I will come," he insisted.

"You must not."

"I will—I will! You spoke of danger. There is none. I'd guard that girl of yours with my life."

A desolate laugh answered him. "That's because you're in love with her. . . Hush! I heard Elma's voice. They're coming this way." She rose, with a melancholy and entreating little wave of both hands. "I cannot allow it. Remember—I forbid it."

"And I will not obey your veto." He repeated these words, and then added: "You can arrange, if you will, that Eloise and I shall never meet. But such arrangement would be preposterous. Good God! I begin to think that you, the most large-natured woman I've ever met, would class me as the sorriest of cads."

"Ah, no, no! And from what I've heard I judge you so differently now! I see you in such a new light!"

"Thanks—from my soul, thanks! Magnus Whitewright, dear friend though he is, doesn't see me that way. It's reserved for a spirit finely liberal as yours to accept my sworn testimony,

odd though this may sound. Now, not another word against my coming here as your physician. I'll send you a prescription this afternoon. And that question of diet—be rigidly ascetic there. . . Hush; they *are* returning. You must save all your opposition for my next visit, day after to-morrow."

At his final word a light cry sounded in one of the doorways. The next instant Elma and Eloise appeared. And in her most jocund treble tones Elma was saying:

"Greendingle is worth twenty of The Terraces! It's wilder and twice as picturesque. And as for its not being near the river—oh, that tiresome old river! There are times when I almost hate it for monopolizing so much attention, and putting on so many airs, and snubbing all the rest of the nice, unpretentious landscape!"

XXI.

WHILE they drove home together, that day, Moncrieffe noticed in his wife a restlessness both of air and speech. Still, however, she had many amiable things to say of Eloise and Mrs. Thirlwall, and once or twice she expressed keen pleasure at the thought that Basil would hereafter bend his best medical skill toward the improvement of the latter's health.

At luncheon she complained that she had lost all appetite. "Isn't it odd?" she said to her

father. "During the drive back I felt quite hungry." Her eyes, while she thus spoke, did not meet those of her husband, though he was watching her with covert intentness. A change in her face had struck him as peculiar.

"Take a sip of this champagne, El," said her father. "It's done my dyspepsy lots o' good. It's as dry as soda-water."

The servant poured her out a glass, and she slowly drank it. Her look turned toward Moncrieffe, now. "If the Thirlwalls would go and live in New York instead of here, and meet more people, Basil, don't you believe Eloise would marry?"

In an instant Moncrieffe recognized the old irritant, aggressive tone. It was muffled in suavity, but he felt it as one feels the sinew of a hand beneath a velvety glove. He was conscious that she expected some sort of betrayal in his look. For this reason he strove not to give her the faintest gleam of one; and hence his concealing effort may have become at least vaguely patent.

"I don't know, Elma. A girl like that, so modest and refined, surely ought to marry."

Here Mr. Blagdon, scenting trouble, looked hideously uncomfortable, and gave a doleful cough.

"Oh, I guess she'll go off pretty soon, *anyhow*," he bustled. "She's the kind that does, pretty complected, but not a bit stylish. She ain't got any of the fine lady about her, like you, El."

This propitiating attempt wrung from Moncrieffe an involuntary frown. But he only said, looking squarely and with much mildness at his wife:

"Won't you try to eat some of that chicken? It's very palatable."

"No," she said, still sipping the champagne.

"Have some bouillon made, then. It's better than going without any luncheon."

"No," she repeated, and set her glass down, almost drained. "I wish I hadn't taken even the wine. It's gone to my head, somehow. It's set my head aching horribly."

"It couldn't have been that," said Moncrieffe; "the wine wouldn't have acted so quickly."

"Perhaps it wasn't that; perhaps it was something else," exclaimed Elma. She may have been going to tell him of the turbid outburst which she had begged Eloise not to mention. But some new mood, if this were true, gave her pause—or possibly some new access of pain.

In a few more minutes she rose from the table, declaring that her head was racked with torment. Moncrieffe followed her from the room, and spent the next two hours in anxious vigil beside her bed.

"It's neurallergier, ain't it?" asked Mr. Blagdon, when told that she was now resting quietly after a good deal of suffering.

"No," said Moncrieffe. "Not that." He looked at the old man, pitying him as the corners of his mouth sagged downward in alarm. "It's more serious than neuralgia." Then he

spoke further, feeling it his duty to be candid, and knowing that every new word he uttered was a dagger-stroke to him who heard it. "And so, you see, this blinding headache means more than I should care to let Elma learn."

"Oh, no, no!" quavered Blagdon. *Don't* tell her, for God's sake! You—you say you knew about it before? In Paris? Why—why the devil didn't you tell me *then*? I'd have had every famous doctor in the city spend hours with her, if they'd each cost a thousand francs a second!"

"It wasn't very pleasant news to give you, Mr. Blagdon. Besides, I had strong hopes that the accursed, insidious thing might completely vanish. As for famous doctors, we've a few here, please recollect—and some very excellent ones besides; for ability and celebrity haven't always the same meaning either in medicine or elsewhere. But Elma refuses to see any other physician. She told me this, very positively, just before she fell asleep."

"She's out of danger now?" eagerly questioned Blagdon.

"Yes. The present attack has passed. If it had become fatal there would have been that coma against which the best science is powerless. But the terrible headache ended in semistupor. To-morrow she may be almost like herself again—weak, but astonishingly better."

"And to-morrow," stoutly affirmed Blagdon, with agony in his tear-misted eyes, "we've got to have the best specialists money can bring to

Riverview. Just let *me* talk to El! I'll bring her round in no time."

But on the morrow, when Elma was clearly better, and when her father did "talk" to her, he was met by the austere opposition.

"Basil, if you please, papa, is all the doctor I want. If I were truly ill, which I'm not and haven't ever been—I should allow no other physician to attend me. So, there, now, please; don't again refer to the subject."

During all this day Blagdon put to his son-in-law many furtive and solicitous questions. Moncrieffe answered them conscientiously. But all the time he realized that his listener's paternal love conspired with his amazement to create a vigorous if gradual skepticism. "I see," ran his thoughts. "The old man passionately rebels against the idea that his worshiped child could be afflicted by a mortal disease. This is entirely natural. And it is equally natural that in his grief and consternation he should hug to himself the comforting fact of my professional inexperience. Heaven knows, I would be glad enough to have him bring, on a salary, to Riverview as many renowned specialists as his fat purse could convene here. It would rid me of a responsibility which threatens to grow more and more irksome."

Elma's recovery was rapid, almost startling. That afternoon she received a number of guests who drifted into The Terraces. Her laughter rang bold and gay; she said extravagant things in her old unconventional style. "Your wife,"

whispered Mrs. Cassilis to Moncrieffe, "is the same dear, original creature as before. Neither marriage nor foreign travel has altered her a bit. My husband (I don't know if you ever suspected it) has always admired her *so* much! Really, if I were a *jealous* wife I might have been glad when she was safely married. But, thank Heaven, I don't know how it *feels* to be jealous, and whatever may be Pinckney's faults, he has never shown any desire to enlighten me."

This decorative little piece of hypocrisy fell rather flat on Moncrieffe. He hardly had either ears or eyes for the guests that came and went, that afternoon. Apprehension gloomed his spirits. If Elma physically could take him so unprepared, might he not expect from her, in a mental sense, some new shock at any moment?

On the following day his dread became reality. The carriage was at the door; a servant had just handed him his overcoat and hat, for the weather still stayed fresh until a swift sweep of heat should bring us our wonted American summer. On a sudden Elma appeared in the hall, coming from one of the side rooms. She held a book beneath her arm, and her tawny, fluffy hair had a tell-tale rumpled look.

"You've been dozing in the library," he said, affably. "I saw you all curled up on one of the big lounges. The multiplicity of cushions gave you a half-smothered appearance; you made me think of a nineteenth-century Desdemona. So I concluded to go away and not wake you."

"To go away?" she repeated, without any trace of a smile. "Where were you going?"

"Why, to Greendingle. Don't you remember? This is the day for my next visit there."

"Yes." . . She spoke absently. In another moment she added: "Just come in here for a little while before you start." He had not time to respond, she shot so quickly back into the library, closing the door after her.

"She has something to say that she does not wish overheard by servants," he told himself; and a slow chill crept through his veins. "What can it be *this* time?"

He found her seated on the edge of the huge lounge where she had lately lain asleep. At least twenty cushions were tossed about on the deep, tufted ledge of silk behind her. Their radiant tints of texture and broiery contrasted keenly with the grave appointments of the chamber, full of oaken bookshelves and surmounted by a groined ceiling, oaken as well.

"I've changed my mind about your going to Greendingle," she said, when he had closed the door behind him and approached her.

"Changed your mind, Elma?"

"Yes. You mustn't go. It's all wrong."

"All wrong?"

"Don't keep echoing me, please. It's all wrong, I said, and I say it again."

"But so short a while since, Elma, you were anxious that I should pay these visits—partly friendly, but chiefly professional."

"I've thought it all over, and my mind is

changed. The visits, from a friendly and professional standpoint, are all right. But from another standpoint . . ." She paused, and the look that she lifted to his glittered viciously.

"From *what* other standpoint?" he said, going quite close to her.

She drooped her gaze, but locked her lips in a kind of smoldering smile, that was full both of sullenness and satire.

Moncrieffe repeated his question. Then, finding it still unanswered, he spoke with a suavity none the less tender because factitious.

"My dear Elma, this is only some fancy that springs from your illness."

"I'm not ill!" she exclaimed, heatedly. "I never felt better than I feel now. You were once very devoted to Eloise Thirlwall, and your going again and again, like this, to the house where she lives, will cause talk. Not that I care for ~~the~~ talk—I despise it. But I can't help caring whether you go or not. You shan't, you must not go." And she rose, fiery, imperious.

"I shall certainly go," Moncrieffe stated.

"Against my will? Against my command?"

"I shall certainly go. Your attempt to stop me is cruel to your friend, Mrs. Thirlwall."

"But not cruel to Eloise!" And she gave a high, bitter laugh.

"This," said Moncrieffe, "is not like your repentant promises that day in the Hôtel Balmoral."

"Ah, you fling that unhappy time back into my face!"

"Who made it an unhappy time? Surely not I. Nor am I flinging it back into your face. . . However, I will not prolong so absurd a dispute. My errand to Mrs. Thirlwall is one of mercy."

He walked to the door. As he did so she darted after him and caught the knob. Thus clutching it, she faced him. "You shan't go there in my carriage—in my father's carriage."

Moncrieffe grew pale. "Be careful," he warned, "or I will never set foot in one of your own or your father's carriages again."

The quiet intensity of this threat told with her. She moved away from the door, with a sudden half-savage sob. He at once opened the door, and while standing near its threshold said across his shoulder:

"You're a sick woman, Elma. You've been more seriously attacked than you may have guessed. Excitement like this can only harm you. Be reasonable; strive to control yourself, and when we next meet show me (I beg of you, for both our sakes) that you have succeeded."

He went straight out upon the lawn, after that, and entered the waiting carriage. His drive to Greendingle was full of distressing thoughts. Here again, he mused, was the hand of that same evil fate which had before so roughly marred his fortunes under the guise of bettering them. He would not have hesitated to leave The Terraces, now, for good and all, had not the fact of Elma's disordered health enjoined such a course. Was it really she herself who treated him in this wildly arrogant fashion?

Was it not the poisoning malady that had captured her? Were her physical state a normal one he might justifiably have ceased to live with her. Could he justifiably cease to live with her now?

No; both as her husband and her physician his place should be near her and his attitude one of submission, toleration, patience. But what a vista of positive future anguish did those three words shadow forth! Indeed here was a martyrdom of destiny, portrayed as if with tinges wrought from blended blood and tears. He must go on living with this woman—must for years go on living with her—conscious that she was mad yet sane, ill yet well, subject at any moment to the assault of a complaint which might afflict either body or mind with unsparing violence.

He had never loved her so well (perhaps he had indeed never really loved her at all) that he could now repress the longing to have her die and end his odious thralldom, with its ghastly promises and perspectives. But he was large and fine and manful enough to feel twinges of poignant self-rebuke for having this longing visit him. Then came the despairful question, sounding the depths of his forlorn spirit: "How can I help a desire which springs spontaneously from a natural unrest, a natural revolt?" By the time that the carriage reached Greendingle, nothing except a vital sense of duty toward Mrs. Thirlwall prevented him from returning home without having entered her gates.

He had an odd sensation of guilt when Eloise

met him in the sitting-room. This he quickly shook off, as not merely absurd in itself but unjust to the pure and lovely girl whose presence had dawned upon him with a strange mixture of pain and joy.

She gave him her hand, but it was easy to discern in her air constraint and coldness. Without cutting him short she somehow seemed to do so, and brought him upstairs into the bed-chamber of her aunt in a way coolly expeditious enough to have drawn from him, at almost any other time, a challenging query as to its cause.

Mrs. Thirlwall, who was lying on a lounge near one of the windows, gave him a sweet smile. As he seated himself at her side, Eloise slipped from the room.

"Your pulse is not quite as I expected to find it," he said, breaking a pause. "There's been some fresh excitement? Frankly, yes or no?"

"Yes," she slowly replied.

He met her eyes. "Dunstan again?"

She nodded, sighing. "Dunstan again—as you say. Don't ask me any more."

"I surmise the rest. He has resented my coming here."

"Resented! Ah, that's to put it mildly. He has been insolent; he has said atrocious things. I was resolute—and I fear my wretched pulse has paid the cost."

Moncrieffe knitted his brows. "I must speak with your son." Below his breath, and a little gruffly, he added: "I must have it out with him."

"*You!* Don't dream of such a thing. If you do, you're not my friend."

"Oh, I mean no hot quarrel—no quarrel at all, in fact. I mean—"

"Hush!" she interrupted. "He's dashed off to town in dreadful dudgeon. If he had not I would have written you not to come."

"But I must have come—I must keep on coming," said Moncrieffe, with placid firmness. "And as for meeting him again, the sooner the better. Any insult from him I am prepared to meet also. And for your sake, believe me, I should push self-control and tolerance to their utmost limits. But no conceivable rebuff would prevent me from regarding you and not him as the real master here. No matter what he said, or even did, I should visit you regularly, just the same. Still" (and now Moncrieffe spoke slower and more significantly), "if you once were to tell me that he and not you held the mastership, there would be no choice for me but to retire."

"He will never hold the mastership while I live. Not that I would not surrender it to him to-morrow but for Eloise."

"I understand you perfectly."

They talked together for a good half-hour, and when Moncrieffe took his leave it was with positive pangs of depression. "You must see me; you must let me come again; you need me," were his parting words.

Hardly had he reached the lower hall when Eloise joined him. He saw a question in her earnest eyes, and straightway answered it.

"Your aunt is not so well. She tells me that there has been trouble between herself and her son."

"There has been grave trouble," said Eloise.

"And it concerns my coming here?"

"Yes," she replied, lingeringly; "yes."

His eyes dwelt on her face, womanly, human, not beautiful, yet so much more than merely beautiful. He thought of Elma, and the difference between these two became a dagger, burying itself in his heart.

"I want to bring your aunt round again," he said. "I'm going to try. But if Dunstan Thirlwall keeps undoing all my good work as fast as I perform it, the task will be impossible."

"That is so true! If there could only be some way of keeping him in town! Aunt Emily is agonized by his incessant persecutions."

Their eyes met for a moment. Eloise drooped hers. A hundred things that he might say besieged Moncrieffe. But with his usual self-discipline he repressed all impulse to touch upon those associations which were already an actual past both to himself and her, while still so recent that the term seemed hyperbole.

"Your aunt," he said, "is the sweetest, the most enchanting of women. She is more—she is the most large-hearted and forgiving."

That last word escaped him almost unawares. Eloise repeated it, with interrogation and surprise that were perhaps equally involuntary.

"Forgiving? Do you mean that she keeps always forgiving Dunstan?"

"No. . . I— Well, yes. Dunstan, if you please—yès."

Eloise shook her head. "She's very angry at him, sometimes."

"No doubt. I—I've known her to be lenient in other ways, however." An irresistible feeling made him add: "She's been very lenient to *me*, and in a matter where she might have shown great harshness. Of all people she might have been least expected to forgive—of all people except one."

It was said; and after saying it he made a movement toward the open hall-door. Then the changing color of Eloise, and a tremor about her lips, detained him.

"I—I didn't know," she stammered, "that your intimacy with Aunt Emily was so great."

"She hasn't told you, then?" he said, off his guard because her voice, look, posture, presence had thus wrought with him. "I fancied she wouldn't tell you. It was so like her to hold it all as a sacred confession. And they say," he went on, with a nervous throb of laughter, "that women can't keep secrets! Such women as she can keep them, though Heaven knows that such women are rarer than black swans!"

"Still, women are curious," she challenged him, falteringly. "They recoil from mystifications."

He strove to catch her vivid eyes, but they looked past him, beyond him, suiting the flurried innuendo of her words.

"I'd tell you the substance of my confession,"

he let himself recklessly answer. "I'd tell you what I told her, if I thought it would give you the faintest comfort."

"Comfort?" she repeated, with a vague curling of the lip. "Why should it give *me* comfort?"

"Only for one reason."

"Well?" She drew away from him, several paces, perhaps unconsciously.

"Only for one reason," he said again, and with a speed that was headlong. "Only if my marriage caused you—pain."

Her brows clouded. "What was your marriage to me, Dr. Moncrieffe?"

"A matter of indifference, no doubt," he hurried. "And yet when I pledged myself to marry Elma Blagdon—when I allowed personal fascination to overmaster me—when I yielded to *her* and forgot *you*—"

"Dr. Moncrieffe!"

"Yes, I will say it, Eloise! She caught me in a kind of magic net. Other men have been fools, I suppose, and I linked my name to the fatuous list. It was not her wealth, or her father's; I never dreamed of *such* incentive. It was the madness and folly of an enticement your purity would not comprehend. I told your aunt, I told Magnus Whitewright, that I was blamelessly entangled into the making of this marriage. But I can't look on you and say so. It seems, now, that if I said so I must be lying."

"Dr. Mon—"

"Lying—yes! And to you the one woman on

earth that I can and do love perfectly—the one woman on earth that I shall go on loving perfectly while life is left to me!”

He had drooped his eyes a little as he spoke these rash words. When he lifted them to her face he saw that it was deathly pale.

“If almost any man but you had spoken to me like this,” Eloise answered, “I should have called him cowardly.”

“Cowardly!”

“Yes. To the woman he had married.” She raised one hand, with an air of unutterable regret and reproach. Then, suddenly turning away, she hurried from the hall, leaving him alone there, pierced by remorse and shame..

XXII.

CONTINUANCE of this mood agonized Moncrieffe during his return to The Terraces. He kept asking himself, with unsparing ferocity of rebuke, if a malevolent fate were blamable for his recent foolhardy act. He satirized his own conduct with unpitying stress. Here indeed was a fine example of that martyrdom to destiny of which he had talked in such pompous phrase! For once at least the chance had been vouchsafed him of opposing resistant circumstance fairly and squarely with the vigor of an untrammelled volition. And how admirably, how chivalrously had he stood the test! Eloise's

word, "cowardly," kept ringing in his ears. Did it not wound him all the worse because conscious of having richly deserved it? Where was his boasted stoicism now? Ah, with what heroic fortitude had he faced the first temptation which this predetermined series of Samaritan visits had brought about! Waive treachery to Elma . . . What of treachery to Mrs. Thirlwall? He had forced *her* to believe in him, and how much handsome fidelity had he paid to this compulsory trust!

He had scarcely found himself within the big lower hall of 'The Terraces when Blagdon met him there.

"Look here, Basil," blurted forth his father-in-law, with agitated speed, "I guess El's in a pretty bad way again. She kind o' got a fit of hysterics after you drove off. She flew into a temper at me when I asked her if there'd been any row between you and she, and told me to mind my own business. I didn't care for that, but I did care to see her white as a piece of paper and crying one minute and laughing the next. And then I coaxed and petted her, and after a good spell of that kind o' thing I got at the truth."

"The truth?"

Moncrieffe started a little as these words left him. He had not dreamed of coming home, like this, with a conscience inwardly quailing and accusative.

"Yes, Basil. It's your going over to Greendingle; that's what's the matter. She won't

stand it. You and I can call it cranky as much as we're a mind; but that ain't going to stop it. And Basil . . ." (from querulous the old man's voice now became plaintive), "we got to remember how sick she is."

"Where is she now?" came Moncrieffe's question.

"In her own bedroom. She's locked herself inside of it. I begged and begged her to let me in, but she'd only say 'no, no, no;' and then I'd hear her sobbing so's it cut me to the heart. It always did keel me right over to hear her cry, even when she was the least little tot. But *now!* It makes me feel's if some one was scalping me, and with a pretty dull knife at that."

"I'll go up and see what I can do," said Moncrieffe. "Perhaps she will not let me in, Mr. Blagdon, any more than she will let you."

But Elma answered his first summons. As she stood in the doorway he perceived that she had been weeping.

"So you went, you went," she began, sullenly. "You disobeyed me and went."

"I owe you no obedience, Elma," he said. "I owe you kindness and courtesy and respect. These I am prepared to pay you, now and always. I went, as you phrase it, and my going, either now or at any further time, is a matter wholly of my own choice."

"Your own choice!" rang her sudden violent cry. "It's your own choice, then, to insult your wife—to make mockery of your marriage—to desert me for a woman you'd have proposed to

if she hadn't been poor and born out of wedlock—"

"Elma!"

"I mean it; I mean every word of it. I hate you! I hate myself that I was ever idiot enough to marry you!" She clenched one hand, and raised it. That she did not strike him on the face was no fault of her own. Moncrieffe caught by the wrist her lifted arm. In another moment she reeled backward, and fell tottering on her knees, just saving herself from a ruinous contusion of the head by an abrupt sidelong swerve of her limber body.

"Oh, Elma, Elma!" exclaimed Moncrieffe, bending over her, "this is horrible and disgraceful!" He strove to raise her, but with lightning change of mood she refused to rise.

"No, no," she wailed, in a transport of seeming repentance. "I told you that I hated you, and I tried to strike you. Let me kneel here and implore your pardon! I lied when I said I hated you. I was a wretch, a devil, when I tried to strike you. But oh, Basil, Basil, *will* you not promise me never to go there again?"

He stooped down, with his eyes fixed unflinchingly on her face. "I will promise nothing of the sort, Elma," he said. "Once and for all, understand this! Once and for all—"

But then a sharp, desperate, shuddering cry broke from her. He saw her eyes close, her head reel, and slipped an arm about her waist just in time.

She had swooned quite away when he raised

her from the floor and carried her to the bed. Scarcely had he laid her there when Blagdon caught him by the sleeve.

"God alive, man, do you want to kill my poor girl?"

Basil turned to him, with a real burst of passion, however brief.

"Do I want to kill her? Can you ask me such a question after what you've seen me pass through with her? But since you do ask it, my answer is this: Your daughter, sir, too clearly wants to kill herself."

Blagdon threw both hands tragically into the air. "All you got to do is to tell her you won't go there any more. All you got to do, Basil, is just that!"

Moncrieffe was bending over his wife, with two fingers at her pulse. "All I *shall* do," he began, "is to maintain—"

There he paused. Whatever inflexible answer he may have been on the verge of making, now straightway died. He perceived that Elma was again in peril of her life. Awakening from her swoon, she began to beseech him, with semi-delirious tone and talk, that he would never willingly meet Eloise Thirlwall again. She at length tore from him a promise to this effect, and he was glad he had given it when he saw how its delivery lulled her ravings and tremors. All the rest of that day she was in the clutch of her former foe, and toward nightfall he telegraphed for two renowned specialists. They did not arrive till noon of the next day. Elma was then in par-

tial collapse. Their verdict was non-committal and yet gloomy. One of them prophesied another term of comparative health, provided this present dire attack subsided. The other was less hopeful; he feared a long and distressing illness, ending perhaps fatally.

When a week had passed, Moncrieffe realized that the second verdict had been the wiser. Elma now left her bed only during short intervals and by no means every day. For hours at a time she would be mild and tractable; then would come roughening storms that wrought horrid havoc with her former calm. Always, however, among the many virulent and vindictive things that she said to him, one belief stayed immutable. "You haven't been to Greendingle," she would often murmur; "I'm sure you've kept your word. I believe in you *that* far." And she did believe in him *that* far, and he realized it, and the realization made him regard with a kind of miserable loyalty the promise which she had dragged out of him in the pathos and pain of earlier illness. He settled into the groove of holding this promise more and more sacred as time lapsed; and the unforgettable drama of his last meeting with Eloise served to clinch, as it were, his wavering fealty. After a while he wrote to Mrs. Thirlwall, telling her that his wife's malady kept him almost incessantly beside her, and that the disease from which she suffered had so far unseated her mind as to cause her the severest anxiety if he were absent from her chamber more than half an hour at a time. This,

as far as it went, was exactest truth. He chose not to explain, however, the real half maniacal dread which lay at the root of her anxiety.

June ended with a fair degree of coolness, but July broke fiercely sultry upon the great, lovely valley. Miles of foliage stood from morning till night in breezeless apathy below the pearly hazes of heat. Some invalids even as weak as Elma might have preferred to be borne to the seashore or the mountains. But she shrank frowningly from all such change. "I couldn't endure," she insisted, "to be carried about on trains and steamboats, as if I were some highly frangible piece of luggage." And once, when quite alone with her husband, she gave a sort of low snarl as she added: "Besides, you'd set me crazy with your stares at other women, just as you used to do in Paris."

Moncrieffe stifled an indignant sigh. She irritated him, but she still kept his pity actively roused. There were times when he became weary to a desperate degree. As she grew weaker and needed more attendance she taxed his care and aid with augmenting demand. When a trained nurse appeared at her bedside she went into a paroxysm of reproach, and accused her husband of wishing to shirk his duties and relegate them to hired hands. In vain her father interfered. Blagdon was racked with anguish by her state, and at the same time filled with a growing admiration for the indefatigable patience of his son-in-law. Whatever resentment Moncrieffe had waked in him was now, to all appearance,

vanquished and lulled. But Elma would have none of her father's counsel, just as she would have none of his personal assistance. For several days she would not accept any medicine from the trained nurse, though at last this antipathy was partially overcome. Partially, that is, in the sense of being waited on by this woman only at certain hours during the day, and requiring her husband always to be in readiness during the night. Hence Moncrieffe would sometimes pass nights of greatly broken rest, and was forced to take long sleeps while the sun shone. When July gave place to August it was still a torrid and exhausting sun. As a matter of course he lost both flesh and color, and began to look sadly haggard.

Magnus Whitewright, thus far through the summer, had driven over to The Terraces and held short talks with him. It was during one of these talks that Whitewright at last fervently said: "Basil, if this keeps on, my boy, you'll die before I do."

Moncrieffe laughed faintly. "My dear Magnus, that's not at all an unpleasant prospect. You've so often prophesied an opposite course of affairs in my hearing that I'm tempted to hail this announcement with a kind of funereal hilarity."

"Joking aside, Basil—"

"But you forget; you *never* leave joking aside if it's a question of when and where and how soon *you* will die. Your mortuary jokes would make a Whitewright-ana of many pages. So

please permit me to have my own modest fling in the same dark direction."

"Oh, very well; you may rouge the cheeks of *pallida mors*, if you please, and dress him in striped hose and rosetted shoes, for all *I* care. . ."

"There you are again, my friend."

"But, Basil, you haven't got your walking-ticket out of the world, as I have. For all my vaunted indifference about going, do you suppose I wouldn't stay here if I could? You *can* stay here—if you want; and now you're letting slow suicide dig a grave for you."

"*Letting*," smiled Moncrieffe, with tired irony. "You might as well blame a cripple for not starting off on a run. I've told you what a captive I am." He rose, with a loud sigh, and went toward one of the library windows. While standing there he added dismally: "No danger of my dying, though, unless it's from ennui."

The room was dusky, book-lined, and majestic with heavy carvings of oak. Its architect had copied it from some library in one of the famed English houses, and perhaps the tasteful caprice of Elma herself had decreed that just beyond its broad mullioned windows of illumined glass should stretch a garden full of holly-hocks and petunias and phlox and other radiant midsummer flowers. As Moncrieffe made the afternoon light drift more amply across the polished oaken floors, nothing could have been more enchanting than the brilliant contrast of these luxurious and neat-tended flower-beds with the somber mediævalism of the low-ceiled room itself. "How hot it is,"

he murmured, standing within the alcove of the window; "how insufferably hot!"

As he spoke, the mellow basses of bees came floating across the stagnant air. Every spire of the hollyhocks had lost its native keenness, glimmering vague beneath gray, fur-like sky. A humming-bird poised above the low, massed trumpet-blooms of the petunias, and the live-coal scarlet on its tiny throat seemed a tropic condensation of the savage heat.

"I find this weather more of a help than a harm," said Whitewright. "Not that it gives me strength, but rather that it lets me feel as if what strength remains to me were not slowly and subtly ebbing away."

"I shall think the better of it, then, from to-day henceforth, Magnus. And I suppose we may expect it all through the rest of August."

"To you it's a deadly nuisance, I perceive."

Moncrieffe gave his head a despairing toss. "Oh, in the circumstances, yes. Ordinarily I shouldn't mind it." He left the window, reapproaching his friend. "The truth is, I'm passing through a fiery furnace, in much more than a merely meteorological sense. And the end is not yet, nor may it come for many months." He laid one hand on the back of Whitewright's chair. "Magnus, I have such ghastly thoughts, now and then," he went on, with voice almost lowered to a whisper.

"I can guess them. You want the end to happen soon, and you want it to be an end of a certain sort."

"Hush—not so loud!"

"You want it not to be recovery but death."

Moncrieffe stooped down and spoke with an eagerness wild and wistful. "Of what use would recovery *be* to her? In a little while this devilish disease would return. She refuses, now, to see any other physician but myself. Would to God I could prevail upon her to let others visit her bedside! It would be futile, but it would take from me a wretched onus!"

"And she's obstinate there?"

Moncrieffe laughed softly, with sorrow and sarcasm interblended. "Obstinate *there!* My God, Magnus, to be, as I am, her slave, her scullion, her factotum, her drudge, her watchdog, her worst enemy and her one clung-to friend, her aversion and abomination this minute and her idol and ideal the next—ah, you can't conceive how it tries and racks!"

"Can't I?" The words were simple, but Moncrieffe felt them lay strong and swift balm on his hurt heart, so pregnantly did they teem with sympathy, pity and love.

He stooped again, and touched Whitewright's pale brow fleetingly with his lips. "God bless you, Magnus! You do feel for me!"

"Feel for you? Basil, Basil, I never dreamed of this!"

Moncrieffe took once more the chair he had quitted. "Magnus, even now she's whimpering to the nurse (whom she detests and bullies and insults) about my absence from the room. Her father knows you're here, and I asked him to

wait at the door and assure her that I was still talking with you, if she should begin to cry out suspicious and scandalous things born of a jealousy that it taxes even charity to term insane. But her father will be treated like an impudent lackey, and will bear it with the most servile meekness. As for myself, when I go back there I shall have my choice between two issues: either I must plunge myself into an open quarrel with her and feel that I am a brute and coward to hold any contest whatever with a sick and death-threatened woman, or I must accept from her a renewal of tyranny whose whimsical details I should be ashamed to specify."

Whitewright seemed to meditate. Then he said, with a sort of measured impetuosity: "I'd throw over the whole shocking burden of it. I'd risk people's chatter, or, rather, I'd show it blank unconcern. It isn't as if she were not girt by all conceivable comfort and ease. Come back and live with me at the little cottage. Save yourself in time."

Moncrieffe signed with his head a slow negative. "I can't do that. It might be self-preservation, but it would constantly taunt me as unmanliness. After all, I took her 'for better or worse.' No. As for peril to my health, I'm tough; I'll survive. It isn't that."

"What is it, then?" sharply asked his friend.

"Can't you think? Can't you guess? I'm there with her for hours when nobody else is near. She sends the nurse away; she won't have her anywhere about; she won't have her

father anywhere about. And then, poor thing, she prays me for something that I dare not give her. She willfully prays for it, I think, because I was once fool enough to tell her that it would bring relief at first and then cause greater misery afterward."

"Morphine?"

"Yes—what else?"

"Good God!" said Whitewright, rising; "you can't mean that you—?"

"Sit down, Magnus, and don't stupidly excite yourself this torrid day." And Moncrieffe pushed him back into his chair again. "Look here, now. It's like this with me: I might discreetly use the drug upon her, and for a long time aid her in marked degree. If she were to live only three or four months, let us say, there would really be an exquisite mercy in using it. But the lingering quality of her illness, and the chance of nature giving her future respites of comparative health, would create the risk of her becoming morbidly fond of it, and that she had become so would weigh heavily on my conscience."

"Your conscience, Basil?"

"Having the stuff *always within arm's reach*, like that, might tempt me terribly."

"Tempt you terribly! Man, what are you saying? In what way could it tempt you terribly? Not in the way, surely, of giving her more . . . *more than was right?*"

Moncrieffe answered with a quick, bleak laugh.

"No. Of giving *myself* more than was right!"

XXIII.

MAGNUS never believed that answer, and for days he was troubled by a thought of some ill happening to his friend worse than even self-destruction. It seemed to him that Moncrieffe had intended to say a certain hideous thing, and then had preferred to leave it unspoken—to substitute for it a thing not quite so hideous. Whitewright, recalling the confessed misery of the man, could realize that he might have listened to a voice of awful temptation. But that he should have yielded to its incriminating counsels—"No, no," he kept telling himself, "a million times, no!" And yet, as his quiet life lapsed on, he could never receive into his mind the image of Basil Moncrieffe without surrounding it by an atmosphere of anxiety and jeopardy.

He had either felt, or fancied that he felt, the abnormal heat of the weather helpful to his shattered lungs. Toward the middle of August, when cooler days came, he found his strength again failing him. Except for the new perturbation roused by his friend, he would have accepted this omen with complete indifference. His philosophy never for an instant failed him, pagan and heartless though some critics might have called it. He was not merely willing to die; he looked upon any unwillingness to die as the absurdest little spasm of contention—as

if a leaf should argue with its twig when the time came for it to fall earthward.

Often he wished that Mrs. Thirlwall would drift into the drug-shop again—or, if not she, Eloise. But neither came. Fearing that one of them might visit the place while he was absent, he left strict orders with his clerk to inform him of their possible appearance. But instead of hearing any news of this sort, he learned, one afternoon, that Eloise had lately been seen to alight from a wagon and enter the doorway of the neighboring druggist. "An intentional avoidance," mused Whitewright. "She and her aunt are no doubt affronted at Basil's behavior to them, and knowing how intimate he and I still are, they both wish to shirk all discussion of his believed slight."

Here he erred, however; for though it was true that Eloise had not wished to meet the friend of Basil Moncrieffe, her motives were far from those of pique. As for Mrs. Thirlwall, she rarely drove abroad at all, nowadays, and it presently reached the ears of Whitewright, through channels of inevitable Riverview gossip, that she was forced to spend much of her time in a reclining posture.

September found Moncrieffe's immurement quite unchanged. It might be said of him, indeed, that he was a prisoner whose manacles had been made weightier and fastened with stolid rivets.

"You are always wanting other physicians to come and see her," he said one day to his father-

in-law. "Be it, then, as you wish. *I* promise, as I need not tell you, to receive them with all possible courtesy. But how will Elma behave? Unless I am greatly mistaken she will cover her head with the bedclothes and tell them, through folds of linen and eider-down, to go away and cease annoying her. She may probably add," he went on, with dreamy dreariness, "that I understand her case better than any other doctor in the world could, and that she has the most implicit faith in my abilities. Afterward, however, I shall no doubt pay the penalty of this public compliment by having her tell me privately that I disgrace the profession I've presumed to practice. Still, make the trial, if you choose."

Blagdon heaved a big sigh. He seemed to have grown a decade older in the last six weeks. "I guess we better make the trial," he said. "P'aps she won't carry on half as bad as you expect."

Two new specialists came up from town, and their verdict (which Moncrieffe pronounced rather safely non-committal) does not concern the present chronicle. But to his amazement Elma proved him, in this case, the falsest of prophets. Her treatment of the physicians could scarcely have been civilier. When they were gone, however, the tempest of her contumacy broke. The coming of these men had been a persecution; her nerves were now in the wildest tumult. Why had Basil permitted this abominable thing? He knew that she had been

willing to put up with his treatment, second-rate doctor though she had often called and thought him. The reason of this was her desire to be rid of wiseacres, wagging their conceited heads over her poor, wasted body. The disease from which she suffered was more mental than physical. She had made a fearful mistake in believing that any happiness could come of her marriage. The first week of their honeymoon had taught her what a wild fool she had behaved like. The more he had pretended to love her the distincter his hypocrisy had shone out. She granted that she had played, from the first, an unfeminine, an unwomanly part. But he, as a man, could have taken a manly stand. He could have snubbed her off her feet the second time they met, there at the Cassilis dinner. But he had been quite the opposite of repelling—oh, indeed, yes! He had led her on to deport herself like a lovesick Amazon. And she *was* lovesick; she admitted it. But that evening, here at The Terraces, he might have put her at arm's length and held her there. He had never loved her as she wanted to be loved—in the finer, fuller, overmastering way. He knew that he hadn't, and being a man, with strength of every sort wholly beyond her own, he should have let her see this. It was his duty to have recognized the real nature of her longing, and to have repulsed it mercifully rather than to have given it a hope which must end soon afterward in racking disappointment. But he'd ignored his duty; he'd let him-

self yield when it was cowardly to yield. Yes, cowardly! He needn't stare at her with that old maddeningly pitying look. If he pitied her so much now he might have pitied her a little *then*—at the time when his pity would have had practical, healing results. If she had been a poor girl and had acted with that same rash folly, he would have known just how to deal with her. She'd have got no clemency, no complaisance then. She'd have got a mild lecture and been politely sent about her business. As if she hadn't brooded over it all a thousand times! As if she hadn't looked it full in the face and been turned to stone by the Gorgon it was!

Through the latter part of this tirade Moncrieffe had gone to a window near the bed whence it was delivered, and leaned one arm on a small table that held two or three books and several glasses of medicine. It was a silvery September afternoon. The unseen sun was westerling like a mighty veiled diamond in a sky over-filmed by pale-blue mist. There was just a bending glimpse of the steely river beyond great clusters of tremulous tree-tops, whose dusky yet scintillant green stayed untouched by the faintest autumnal ravage. The invalid's rasping and malapert tones had for him a kind of insulting effect upon the lovely landscape at which he gazed, and seemed to parody in saucy mockery the thin, sweet, pleading trebles of the crickets, beginning even before sunfall their delicate chant which autumn darkness and starshine and dew would soon resonantly louden.

He rose and went to her bedside. The late, whitish light smote her bony face with merciless violence of volume. She had closed her eyes, and breathed somewhat exhaustedly. Perhaps familiarity deadened Moncrieffe's pity as he looked on her wrecked haggardness. Often she had stirred his resentment, of late, and often he had repressed its fretful outplay. He knew that he would use such control now; and yet so cruelly had she just turned the old knife in the old wound that he felt some sort of resistant disclaimer would not ill consort with even the stern law of patience that he had laid down for himself.

"Elma," he said, very softly. She opened her eyes and stared up at him. The eyes gleamed immense from her cadaverous face.

"Oh, you've found your tongue, Basil, at last!"

"Only to tell you this, Elma: If I had been false to you in the grossest fashion—if I had flaunted a mistress before you instead of showing you my fullest fidelity and respect, you might with reason assail me like this."

She closed her eyes again, and he moved away. But suddenly he heard her cry from the bed:

"Oh, you've been perfect! Throw that in my face—your exquisite perfection! I know why you do it—to try and make me more miserable than I am, lying here stricken and prostrated." He came hurrying back to the bed, and reached out a hand to stroke her hair and temples; but she caught the hand and flung it away with

spiteful vigor. "A mistress!" she almost shouted. "I wish you *had* had one! Anything would have been better than the neat, respectable, self-cautious lie you've masked under!"

"Elma! Elma!"

Soon afterward she was seized with one of her worst spells of pain. It lasted until dark had set in, and needed the urgent offices of both her husband and the nurse. During its continuance she became slightly delirious, and embarrassed Moncrieffe before the nurse by clasping one of his hands in both her own (so burningly hot, so fibrously thin!) and imploring him to pardon her for the late lawless words that she had hurled at him. When her suffering grew most keen, she began to beg him once again for that drug which he dreaded to let her taste. He gave her another, of similar effect, and felt relieved by the pacific results it wrought. She was sleeping by seven o'clock, when he went to his own apartments, utterly despondent in spirit.

"It is just as I knew it would be," he brooded. "These new-comers merely excite her by their presence. Hereafter if outside advice is to be given I will receive it, describing her condition, but refusing all admittance to her bed-chamber. . . . And as for morphine, I'm tempted to begin it with her. The end seems near, now. Both those doctors, after seeing her and hearing all I had to say, gave her at the most scarcely a month longer to live. What conceivable harm could morphine do? Many an-

other man in my place would have used it long ago. . . This evening, after dinner, if she still sleeps on under the effects of that potion, I'll steal away to Magnus, have a talk with him, and get from him a certain prescription. By all means that will be the sanest and wisest course."

As he thus reflected, Moncrieffe had completely forgotten his odd and dubious statements to Whitewright a few weeks before. They were born of a nervous, hysteric depression, and all thought of them had now passed away. He had no more wish or will to diminish by one second the existence of his unhappy wife than he had wish or will to cut his right hand from its wrist.

On reaching his own apartments he drew a long, relieved breath. There was still a little while before the hour for dinner—that cheerless dinner at which he and Blagdon would face each other in the great dining-room, both trying to seem as if the air they breathed were not leaden. On the large open desk in his dressing-room Moncrieffe found some cards and letters. Blagdon saw no visitors, nowadays, passing his time either in moody walks about the grounds or in piteous eavesdroppings at the door of his child's sick-room. The mournful social wave of condolence at Elma's affliction broke here, as it were, on Moncrieffe's private desk. He had only to repair thither at the end of each day in order to see just who had called, who had sent messages of sympathy, who had written letters

formal or spontaneous. This evening he found one of many which Mrs. Thirlwall had written. He read it almost with tears; for, in parts, it answered so feelingly and with what might be termed so encircling an atmospheric warmth, his own doleful apologies for having forsaken Greendingle. "My poor boy," a part of it ran, "I shall really be worse if you worry about my becoming so. The medicine you insisted on having conveyed to me will aid me far more if I soon learn from you that you have stoutly revolted against having my health and general welfare any longer on your conscience. I am sure you are well aware that in a relatively brief lapse of time you have made me peculiarly fond of you: hence I shall suffer with your sufferings, languish with your captivity, if you cannot write me happier news at an early date. And Eloise joins me in the longing that happier news will soon reach us both."

He read over that last sentence twenty times without knowing it. "Dear girl," he said to himself, "she has kept my insolent outburst a secret. God bless her for showing me that respect when I deserved it so ill!"

On another page of the letter he found: "Our home is much more peaceful than formerly. Dunstan has ceased to vex and sting me with regard to a sale of the estate. Perhaps this attitude may be explained by the news that before long we shall receive a handsome offer for a great slice of it from that Railway Company which has kept shrouding its real purport

in so many evasions and procrastinations. But oh, I can never reconcile myself to the thought of that old, memory-haunted graveyard being partially torn up! Thank Heaven my husband's grave and those of his kindred are safe from spoliation! There is to me such ruthless barbarism in any desecrating course like this! The very helplessness of the dead should clothe them with inviolable sanctity! I should suffer beyond words if our plot were not so situated as to be quite beyond the reach of the marauders. . . . Whatever has really caused this change in Dunstan, I accept it with untold gratitude. Will you believe me when I tell you that he has not scowled at any of poor little Anita's prattle for over a week, and that last evening, on returning unexpectedly from one of his trips to town, he honored Eloise with a bow (not a nod, but an actual, full-fledged bow) when they chanced to meet in the lower hall, and dizzied her with consternation by remarking that it had been a beautiful day?"

"The incalculable cad!" Moncrieffe mentally groaned. . . . Still elsewhere in the fascinating letter he read—

"I sometimes tell myself that I think more of death, nowadays, than ever before, and always in a vein by no means morbid. Do you remember our conversation on that evening when we first met—the evening when a poor, unnerved old woman fell genuinely in love with you? I then babbled most unbecomingly, and talked of

alterations in my spiritual moods and creeds with as much airy levity as though they had been the latest phases in bonnets and gowns. I was restive, unappeasable, then. I had lost the power to believe, and unbelief was only an intellectual elixir, giving no stimulus at all to my moral nature. But now all that is changed; the dissatisfaction, the revolt, the longing to envisage destiny with reprimand, and challenge her to give reasons and excuses—each has refreshingly vanished. Not that I am in the least cut, in my present mental configuration, after the pattern of your friend, Whitewright. Both of us have apparently found peace, but in ways that are widely different. *He* has found it (as certain eloquent and original sentences of his made clear to me when I visited him during his illness) in a conviction of his own complete individual unimportance. *I* have found it in feeling myself doomed to annihilation among the very best of company. Magnus Whitewright spoke truly when he said to me that there is nothing actually less marvelous in the lungs of a gnat than in the brain of a Shakespeare. So, I feel, there is nothing more or less natural in my own bodily decadence than in the wilting of a rose, the plashing of a sea-wave, the fading of a sunset. Have you ever gone to bed tired and wanting to sleep, yet been beset with a curious dread of that smothering and annulling thrall which slumber would exert upon you? That *was* my state. Now I often feel like one who

will lay upon his pillow, when the appointed hour comes, a head both weary and willing. In other words, that terrible sense of lapsing into eternal blankness has graciously withdrawn. And then there is always hope, that flower of such superb hardihood that it can feed on air like an orchid with the dear dissimilarity of never being a parasite. And how deathless hope is, yet often how delicate! It is like the choicest of lilies, like the commonest of weeds! One minute we seem to see in it the rarity of an exotic, another minute it wears the wilding ubiquity of grass. . . What, I sometimes ask myself, if *that* were God, that only? Everybody has it; it is so cheap and yet so precious! How many thousands has it saved from madness! I knew an atheist once, in my earlier days, when I was devoutly religious. I thought him a horrid wretch, merely because he did not believe. He said the most scorchingly cynical things, or so they seemed to me then. But now, in remembering them, I perceive that they were tinged with hope. Nothing can argue it away; it creeps between the crevices of every syllogism. When I am weak, and have to lie down, yet still am hopeful, I feel its influence as never before. I begin to think that in some form or another it never dies till we die ourselves. Then, perhaps, it becomes—realization! Ah, that tantalizing will-o'-the-wisp, Perhaps!"

There were other notes and letters, one or two of them most kindly and humane, from people like Mrs. Cassilis, Mrs. Bellchambers, or that

Miss Bertha Dilloway, of whose aphasiac father Elma herself had not long ago made such unscrupulous fun. But nothing gave him a shadow of the comfort which he had drawn from Mrs. Thirlwall's impetuous yet thoughtful pages. This lightened the heavy dreariness of his dinner with Blagdon, who talked solely of his ill-fated child, and was sublimely forgetful that she had forbidden him from entering her room since the previous afternoon, when he had thrown her into a pettish outburst by the crackling of a newspaper tucked unconsciously under his arm.

After dinner Moncrieffe went upstairs again, and found that Elma still tranquilly slept. He gave certain orders to the nurse, and then passed down through the great, still house. As he quitted it and went toward the stables he felt like a prisoner escaping from durance. Such, in a certain sense, he indeed was, and he made his exit stealthily through fear that his father-in-law might hear it and come forth and ask him in astonishment if he were really going to leave his charge for any length of time. At the stables he got a horse harnessed in rather quick time, and was soon on his way to the village, hoping that he would find Whitewright in his shop. He took a dog-cart, and drove himself, with a man behind him. The stars burned large and yet rayless in the sweet, mild gloom. It was good to be out like this, with the smell of leaves and grasses in one's nostrils. He *relished* his freedom keenly. Days had passed

since any such charm of change had befallen him. The cries of the crickets and katydids burdened the soft dark with their melancholy monotonous. He seemed to hear in them a lament for his own shattered happiness. And then certain words of Mrs. Thirlwall's letter came echoing through his spirit. How truly had she written of the imperishability of hope! But on a sudden he felt himself quietly thrill. Did not hope mean for him, after all, a selfish desire that some one should die? How horrible to *have* that desire, no matter what strain and wrench of persecution, of weariness, of desperation might have engendered it! And yet its darkness knitted itself into the darkness of the night; its yearning inward cry became the cry of the myriad insect voices around him; its irrepressible glow was visibly duplicated in the lights of remote planets and suns, crowding the infinite arch above him with their tender brilliance and divine mystery.

Whitewright stood prosaically behind the counter as Moncrieffe entered his shop. The place was empty of customers, and both clerks were away.

"Basil! I'm so glad to see you!"

"And I'm tremendously glad to get out of jail for an hour or so."

"You don't mean—?"

"I'm an incarnate escape, dear boy! You don't know what I'm going through!"

"Tell me—tell me."

They talked together for perhaps five minutes,

leaning on different sides of the counter and looking into one another's eyes.

"Horrible!" at length said Whitewright. "No wonder you look fagged out."

"Do I look that way?" Moncrieffe replied. "I can stand fatigue, Magnus; I've a fund of real health to draw upon. But you, my friend. . ."

Whitewright drew back a little, with a soft laugh. "Now you're paying me back in my own coin, Basil."

"No, no. But there's a change in you."

"Well—there ought to be. I had a slight hemorrhage yesterday."

"Magnus!"

"I've felt a good deal better all to-day. But I haven't been here at all till about two hours ago. It's Thomas's day off, and I let Henry have the evening to himself till closing-time—ten o'clock or thereabouts."

"Oh, my dear Magnus, you shouldn't have come here! You should have stayed at home to-day, and you should have sent for me yesterday as soon as your attack occurred!"

"Sent for you? As if you were not busy enough without the bother of any summons from me!"

"Such a summons could never find me busy—you know it!"

"And yet you've just told me—"

"That *she* is imperative, irrational, unmanageable! But that would not have kept me from hastening to you if I had received three words—two—one!"

"Bah, my dear friend!" smiled Whitewright, with his pale lips. "I'm fairly well now. I rested through the day. So, there, let us talk of more cheerful things."

"Of myself, for instance," broke sardonically from Moncrieffe. "Of my poor, shattered wife—of her dazed, agonized father!"

"Things *are* forlorn with you, truly! I suppose you've still some consolation in reading?"

"Oh, yes; I read omnivorously. There's the library, you know, stocked by Elma herself with many good books. Classics mostly, you know. But how one goes back to the classics for real distraction and absorption, after all! And that reminds me, dear Magnus. I was so glad to get the package of novels you sent."

"Your note told me so."

"I should have made it longer, but every day I was in hopes of dropping over to see you. It pleased me to find five or six good American novels. We're doing so much better work in fiction nowadays than the English."

"Do you think so?" retorted Whitewright, with a touch of his old argumentative belligerence. And then he pleased his friend by showing him that he was well enough to scold him for liking some of the careful Franco-American realists, naturalists and analysts better than certain modern English romanticists, with their pictorial and prismatic treatment of life. But suddenly he stopped short. "You're not listening, Basil," he affirmed.

"Oh, yes. You were saying. . . But, really,

Magnus, I'm afraid to stay much longer. If she wakes and finds me absent there's no telling the dire results that may follow."

"Dire?"

"Oh, well, after what I've told you, form your own conclusions . . . I have formed mine on a certain point. I'm going to let her have morphine."

"Oh, you are?"

"Yes. It's absurd not to give her that one precious relief now."

Whitewright was staring downward at his counter as he said: "You mean subcutaneous injections?"

"Yes.. She prayed for relief of that sort yesterday, in one of her fits of pain. I spoke of the matter to those doctors this morning."

"Oh, you did, you did?" Whitewright's eyes were lifted, peeringly, below gathered and worried brows.

"How queerly you speak, Magnus!"

"Do I? Well . . ."

He paused, and Moncrieffe grasped his arm. "What's the matter? . . . I'd forgotten the trash I rattled off that hot day when we talked together at The Terraces. But something in your look makes me remember it now. . . In Heaven's name, Magnus, I hope you don't hold me accountable for it?"

"Do I seem as if I held you accountable for it?" replied Whitewright, with a thin, vague little laugh.

"Upon my soul you *did* seem so—or I thought

you did." Here Moncrieffe sighed loudly. "Some fancy of mine, perhaps, born of fatigue. . . I want the morphine, however. Make it up for me at once, please." He then spoke as one physician to another, explaining just the amount and quality of the desired preparation.

As he ended, Whitewright gave a quick cough and put a hand to the region of his heart. His face, usually pale, had in an instant grown ashen. Moncrieffe darted behind the counter and grasped his shoulders.

"Magnus! You're ill again?"

"No, no." And then Whitewright drew a long breath, which ended in a smile. "There! You see? I'm *all right* again. It was nothing."

"Nothing? Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"You look better than you did a minute or two ago. . . Magnus!"

"Yes?"

"Let me drive you straight home, after you've got me that preparation."

"That preparation—yes."

"Do you feel well enough to make it for me?"

"Oh, yes. I'll . . . I'll make it at once. Wait here, Basil. By the way, my clerk, Henry, may come in at any moment, now. You'll receive him if he does come, will you not, and tell him I'm busy off yonder?"

"Yes."

Whitewright disappeared, and he had scarcely done so when the expected clerk arrived. He was a young man, with an intelligent face, and

seemingly not much past twenty years. In a semi-whisper Moncrieffe addressed him.

"You are Henry, the clerk, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Henry, Mr. Whitewright isn't well enough to stay here this evening. He's making up a prescription for me, and when he's through with it I want to drive him right home. You understand?"

"Oh, indeed I do, sir! Mr. Whitewright oughtn't to have come out this afternoon. I told him everything would be all right here. He's very sick, sir; he's a good deal sicker than he's willing to give in."

"True enough."

At the same moment Whitewright stood in the rear of the shop, quite concealed from view. In a little while he began to busy himself with certain chemicals. But a great fear was at his heart, and this fear filtered through his lips in vagrant murmurs.

"Am I sure of him? That word 'temptation.' . . . Not that he spoke it to-night. . . But if, when I gave him the drug, he *should* be tempted. . . Have I the right to give it him? . . . Suppose I went out there again and told him frankly I've *not* the right. . ."

But at length the vial was made up, and he brought it forth to Moncrieffe. "Thanks," the latter said, placing it in his pocket. "And now, Magnus, you are going to let me take you directly home. I'll drop you at your door. Ann's there still—faithful old Ann?"

"Yes."

"Tell her I say you mustn't get up to-morrow till— Magnus! Magnus!"

Whitewright had dropped into a chair, and his head had fallen backward. It was a swoon of utter exhaustion. An hour passed before he had recovered sufficiently from it to be borne by Moncrieffe and Henry into the carriage.

Ann received them frightenedly when they reached the cottage. But she rallied soon, like the capable and sturdy old creature that she was.

"I'll take good care of him, never fear, sir," she said, when Whitewright had been got under the bedclothes, drowsy, faint, almost speechless.

"Don't let him leave his bed all day to-morrow, Ann," enjoined Moncrieffe, just before his departure.

"No, sir. I'll do my best not to. But I guess he'll be too weak, anyway."

"I'm afraid he will, Ann—I'm afraid he will. . . And to-morrow afternoon, or before that time, I'll try to drive over again."

"Very well, sir."

And with a heavy heart Moncrieffe left the still form on the bed, going softly downstairs and re-entering his carriage. . .

Two hours later Magnus Whitewright woke from his lethargy. The old servant had left him, feeling sure that he would not need her through the rest of the night. He woke with great suddenness. A shaded lamp burned on a table not far from his bed. He rose, and soon partially dressed himself, putting his feet into

slippers and wrapping his form in a loose woolen gown. This cost him great effort, and now and then he was forced to pause, panting from exhaustion. At length he seated himself at his writing-desk and began a letter, which he wrote slowly and with characters insecure. This letter he sealed, and addressed it to Moncrieffe; then he put it in a larger envelope, addressing that also to Moncrieffe. Afterward he wrote a short note to his friend, which ran thus: "Herein you will find a letter which I earnestly beg that you will not open till three months have elapsed from the time at which you read these lines. This may sound mysterious to you, yet for the sake of our old friendship bear with me and grant my request. If I am alive by then you can come and scold me and storm at me all you please. If I am dead, think leniently of my measure, and remember that its motive has been rooted in devout affection."

He placed this note, merely folded, in the large envelope, which he also sealed. He left the one rather bulky missive on his desk, and disrobed himself for bed. Just before he again lay down he looked at himself with fixity in the glass above his bureau. He saw that his pallor had become intense.

He felt no pain, nor any nervous distress. But his bodily weakness and weariness were acute. As he drew the coverlid about him he told himself that he was glad he had written those two letters, for there was strong chance that he might not be well enough to leave in a good

while the bed he had just entered. "I was foolish," he mused, "to go out at all to-day." Then a drowsiness overcame him, and he slept for perhaps an hour. When his eyes unclosed upon the plainness of the little bedroom, he seemed to be looking at everything through a grayish haze.

"Is it death?" he thought. He had not the least qualm of fear. "How commonplace it seems to die, when one thinks of the billions and billions that have set this fashion for us from remotest centuries down to the present minute! I always told myself that I would not be afraid when it came. I dreaded physical suffering, though—who doesn't? And I'm so lucky to pass away like this. But I would have liked to know it was coming so quickly, because of bidding good-by to dear old Basil." Then his instinctive, indestructible sense of humor caused him to laugh aloud in the still, dim room. "What if I were making a blunder, a serio-comic blunder, and should fall asleep again, and wake up a little better, and go back to the shop again, and portion out pills and cough mixtures all through the winter, and to go five or six funerals of old Riverview acquaintances, and feel pretty bad in the ensuing spring, and grow rather better again toward June, and almost *hear* people say of me that I had one foot in the grave, wondering why the other one didn't follow it and get there as well, so as to relieve me of such a ridiculous chronic straddle and limp? How funny that would be, and what a verification of the old proverb about threatened men! . . . How ab-

surdly funny, and how I'd poke jokes at myself afterward, and . . ."

He fell asleep with a laugh on his lips, and literally died with a smile on them. Old Ann came in at dawn, and saw the smile, and shrieked as she saw it, so frozen it looked and so unalterable.

But to any one who had known the man well in life that smile would have been a study infinitely subtle. It was so serene, so defiant, so sarcastic, so humorous and yet so human.

XXIV.

WHITEWRIGHT'S death was a fearful shock to Moncrieffe. On coming over to the cottage he found the big envelope bearing his name, read the loose note inside of it, glanced at the other smaller envelope, thrust this into his pocket with hardly even a slight thrill of curiosity, and reabsorbed himself in the grief which almost smotheringly clouded his soul.

To his surprise, that night, he had found Elma so much quieter and better on his return to her bedside, that he placed under lock and key the drug he had procured in the village. She was wide awake when he entered the room. She asked him where he had been, though not with any tinge of irritation in her tones. He told her quite unreservedly, except as regarded the swoon of poor Whitewright, and she answered that she

was glad he had looked up his old friend. After this amazingly unforeseen disclosure she gave him her hand, which was cool and natural of touch. "My long sleep has greatly refreshed me, I think," she furthermore said. "Even if I stay awake a good deal during the night I imagine that I shan't mind it very much."

Moncrieffe felt so relieved, and so palpitatingly hopeful of less inclement future relations with her, that he could ill find a fit phrase of response. Presently she again spoke to him with a most reasonable calmness, telling him that she intended making a great effort in the future to bear more bravely both the tedium and suffering of her lot. Once more, without a trace of excitement, she begged him to pardon her. "I can't help hoping," she added, "that in a little while some marked change for good will occur to me. I somehow feel to-night that I am going to get gradually better henceforward."

This last sentence pierced her listener with its pathos. His medical knowledge told him that she was doomed, that she could never rise except briefly and feebly from the bed whereon she lay. But he cheered her with all sorts of comforting answers, and in so doing he played a very noble and beautiful part, a part all the more noble and beautiful because of the recent torture to which she had subjected him, and because of that inward sense of having been persecuted by fate which many other men would have turned into an excuse for the most egotistic self-pity.

He watched by her till she again fell into a

placid slumber, dismissing the nurse. An hour or so later he saw the chance of getting a good night's rest, and gladly, tiredly took it. . . Then, on the following morning, came the bitter news, fraught for him with grief and awe.

He kissed, again and again, the white brow of his dear friend. The death of Magnus White-wright was a searching and crushing sorrow. It seemed strange that Elma should give him, as she did, such ample sympathy. She had grown strong enough to sit up in an arm-chair; she cordially received her father and bade him remain with her during her husband's enforced absences; she was graciousness itself to the astonished and somewhat embarrassed nurse. All this while she kept saying the most kindly things about dear Basil's loss, and occasionally shed a few soft-flowing tears while she talked of it.

The funeral was excessively simple. Almost none of the Riverview gentlefolk came to it, though the small church was wholly filled. Neither Mrs. Thirlwall nor Eloise was present. With a great wreath of white roses, however, the former sent a letter full of loving-kindness. "I dare not risk the strain," ran one passage in her letter, "that such an experience would now mean to me. You, of all others, will understand." Beyond question Moncrieffe did understand; but regarding Eloise it was different. He kept saying to himself "She might have come"; and yet he somehow very clearly perceived her reason for remaining away.

Not only had Whitewright left no close friend besides himself, but he had died without near relations of either sex. This made his funeral exquisitely appealing for Moncrieffe, who stood afterward almost the sole mourner beside his fresh-made grave.

And yet the grateful change in Elma somehow lightened her husband's gloom. It was hard for him to grieve now as he would have grieved a little while ago. The torturing stress of his captivity had abated; he no longer had that suffocated sense which clad every hour in torment. It astonished and delighted him to find that his wife hailed with pleasure the fact of Whitewright's having left him the cottage and all his other possessions, of whatever sort. She interested herself, a little later, in Moncrieffe's sale of the drug-shop to one of Whitewright's clerks, whom a liberal kinsman backed in the purchase of it.

"This makes you really a capitalist, does it not, Basil?" she said to him almost merrily one day. "You've your own income added to what poor Magnus left you, and you've that charming little cottage besides."

"And the cottage, with its small enclosure of ground, is so charming nowadays, Elma! The vines have almost completely covered it, and the trees on the little lawn have grown surprisingly. . . Perhaps before the end of autumn we can drive over there and take a look at it together."

"Do you think so?" she murmured; and her

eyes, made so large by the leanness and pallor of her wasted face, burned pleadingly. "Do you really think I shall be well enough to go out before the cold weather begins?"

"Why, yes," he answered, humoring the trust of recovery in her which he now knew to be baseless and visionary. "You must keep up your courage and cheerfulness. There is so much in that."

"And the weakness, Basil? Yesterday I sat up twenty minutes longer than the day before. Shall I go on improving, do you think?"

"I've every reason to expect that you will."

"Every reason to expect! That sounds so lukewarm, somehow. But perhaps I want too decided a reply. Still, tell me, do you believe I shall be perfectly well by three months from now?"

Questions like these were incessantly leveled at Moncrieffe, and the magnitude of certain charitable falsehoods which he told often caused him to ask himself what depths of remorse they would have plunged him in if pure mercy had not prompted their utterance.

But other introspections occupied him. "How relative," he reflected, "is all human happiness! Here am I, married to a woman whom I do not love, and within easy distance of a woman whom I love very dearly. And yet just this respite and surcease from recent miseries renders me so thankful that I can look forward with positive exultance to months and years of the same flavorless yet painless existence."

"Do you think this change in El is going to last?" Blagdon kept asking him, day after day. And day after day he would reply that he had no belief it would last. But for all the effect his answer seemed to produce, it struck him that he might as well have prophesied Elma's quick re-possession of health. Her father lost his air of dejection, and brightened back to his former self. Evidently he either could not or would not believe in his daughter's doomed condition, now that so marked an apparent convalescence had befallen her. Meanwhile Moncrieffe felt as if he were holding with both hands some fragile amphora, brimming with a precious liquid which it would be disaster to spill. It was all a flicker of seeming vitality, of seeming sanity, both in spirit and flesh. Soon the ineradicable disease might reassert itself, and in this case her fierce grievance against him for having married her without the one finer kind of love for her (preposterous and even ludicrous as such grievance was) might reassert itself as well.

And so he dwelt beneath perpetual omen and threat. It was like living with a crazed creature; it was indeed living with a crazed creature in nearly every practical sense. And yet there were times when Moncrieffe, so large and generous and human as he was, felt that the bitter and smoldering grievance of this woman was immensely to be pitied. No matter how wrong, how reckless, even how immodest had been her course in seeking to secure what most other women would either have had freely proffered

them or died without so much as hinting that they desired, she was, nevertheless, in her primary scorn of convention and her subsequent poignancy of disappointment, a figure deeply to be pitied.

At any moment he had steeled himself to receive a new shock, and one day it came. She conceived the idea of going downstairs, and he warned her against making the effort. She persisted, however, and he had not the courage to tell her that if she refused his counsel the step might mean her death. And so, between the nurse and himself, followed by her alarmed and almost breathless parent, and looking a white, phantasmal wreck from whom any of her former friends might well have shrunk in horror, she descended, very slowly and feebly, the great main staircase of the mansion.

"Oh, how bright and pleasant this lovely day makes everything look!" she exclaimed, on reaching the lower hall. "I'm so glad I insisted on coming down! And it's all so nice and natural! I really believe that after I've rested a little I can go out on the terrace, and. . ." Here her smile changed to a grimace of agony, and she clutched her breast with a short, strangled cry. In another minute she had fainted completely away. . . Moncrieffe bore her light frame upstairs in his own arms. For hours during the rest of the day he expected that every breath would be her last. That evening, during a brief absence from her room, and while she lay in a sort of coma which he himself had induced,

he said, wildly and frenziedly to her father: "This is almost the end, now, and thank God for it!"

"Basil!"

Blagdon dashed toward him and caught his arm. "How dare you say that?" cried the old man. "How dare you thank God that my child is dying!"

In a second Moncrieffe realized the thoughtless folly of his words. With gentle force he pressed Blagdon into one of the library chairs. "I beg you to pardon me. I didn't know what I was saying."

"It seems that you knew rather too well," came the retort, between a scowl and a sob. "I guess if you hadn't you wouldn't spoken so."

"But you mistake, there. I was thinking only of how I had pitied poor Elma, not of how I cared for her. I've known that something like this was sure to happen—I've known it for days."

"You've said so," murmured the old man, softening a little. Then he suddenly shivered. "But oh, to . . . to thank God she was going to die!" He clenched both hands, and looked up at his son-in-law with angry sorrow.

Moncrieffe grew stern. "I thanked God, if you please, that her horrible anguish might soon end, with no chance of its repetition. That was all." He caught the old man by either wrist, and shook his hands with tender violence, stooping over him in pained solicitude. "If I had it *my* way, she would live a hundred years, provided she could escape the torture I've lately seen her suffer."

He softly placed Blagdon's hands at his sides, yet still bent above him. "I believe you *would*, Basil," he stammered miserably. "I guess I'm pretty well knocked over by this relapse of El's. I kept hoping. . . I couldn't help keep hoping. And now you say I was wrong. But you said I was wrong for a good while past, didn't ye?"

"Oh, I was so positively certain, Mr. Blagdon! . . . Listen, please."

"Well, well. I *am*, ain't I?"

"Ever since Elma was taken so ill to-day I've been trying morphine."

"Morphine, Basil?" Blagdon was eagerly scanning Moncrieffe's wan face. Something he saw there, or believed that he saw, made him slip a hand into his son-in-law's. There are actions like these, seemingly slight, that convey vast significance. It was now as if Blagdon had said, "Haven't I watched all your devotion to her for months past, and do I not know that you've been to her a husband in a million?" But aloud he repeated, with tones of weary solemnity, "Morphine, Basil?" And then, in a wandering way, he added: "I thought you'd given her that long ago."

"No, no. I've never given it till to-day. I've never dared."

"Dared?"

"There were medical reasons. We'll pass over those. To-day I've tried it, and it has astonished me by its weak effect. Her sleep, now, is owing to it, but considering the strength of my former treatment she should have had,

hours ago, the alleviation from pain that she now finds. But still, the thing acts like that with some people; no physician can be sure; it's powerless, or worse than powerless, with some temperaments. Hers isn't of that kind, as I've at last discovered, thank God!"

"‘Thank God’ again, eh?" broke from Blagdon. But he did not speak accusingly; he even accompanied his words with a faintly genial smile.

"Ah, forget that—forget it!" cried Moncrieffe. And then he broke down a little, his eyes glistening as with unshed tears and his chin trembling below its dark floss of beard.

Blagdon got up from his chair, with droll yet pathetic speed. "Basil, I'm sorry! . . . There, give me your hand. . . That's right. If El's got to go there's one thing about it all, and that's this: *You'll* have kept her alive as long as nursing and watching and care-taking could fix things, by hook or by crook! . . . "

This concession had its weight with Moncrieffe; and yet, when he re-entered Elma's bedroom the memory of his infelicitous "Thank God" was alive in his brain. "Blagdon will remember," he thought. "His passionate paternity will make him harbor that random exclamation. . . Well, and if this be true? Deeply as I pity him, I need not temporize with his caprices."

An hour or so after he had returned to Elma's room the sick woman awoke, and in great suffering. He had dismissed the nurse, who was already tired and might be needed later. Till

midnight he used his best resources. The morphine failed as an injection far more than he had dreamed of expecting. She drowsed, and then waked in agony; drowsed again, and then re-awaked, with repetition of her former moans.

"I wish you would kill me," she at length panted. "Won't you? won't you?"

"Hush, my poor child—hush!"

"Why doesn't the morphine stop or at least deaden this misery?"

"Perhaps it will, soon."

"Soon! Oh, I'm sick of the word. . . Basil!"

"Well, my dear?"

"What a stone I am round your neck! What a hideous, loathsome nuisance I am!"

"Elma! Please don't!"

"In your heart of heart you want me to die—you know you do."

"My dear child, what *are* you saying?"

"Of course you don't put it to yourself in plain, blunt terms: 'I want her to die.' That isn't what I mean—oh, no. You try to keep the wish down—to bury it deep in your spirit, so that its voice will only sound, if at all, like the cries of somebody being smothered beneath a mattress. But all the time, as you know very well, you want me to die, you want me to die."

She kept wailing the words over and over, and as she did so her father entered the room. Moncrieffe met him at the door. "I wouldn't go near her now," he urged, in a whisper. "You'll only add to her excitement, and there's a chance that she'll presently get more sleep."

Blagdon yielded, recrossing the threshold. But Moncrieffe knew that he had heard those horrid words, iterated so distressingly from the bed. After the door was again closed he went back to Elma and sank down on his knees beside her, taking her hand—the frailest white atom, now—and touching it repeatedly to his lips:

“My dear wife, I want you to *live*; I want that only, and I am trying my best to bring you back to health.” He felt nearly sure that she would probably die in a few hours at the furthest, but he deemed it best to choose these terms of speech with her. “Now, pray see if you can’t yield yourself to sleep. It may work wonders for you, my dear; there’s no medicine so strong and good.”

A little later she fell, or seemed to fall, into a kind of dose. Anyway, her agonizing moan of “you want me to die” ceased, and her eyelids dropped over the wild, fevered, steely shine of her eyes.

Suppressing a sigh of blended gratitude and pain, Moncrieffe rose and passed into the adjoining room. His head throbbed strangely; his limbs were full of fluttering tremors. He flung himself into an arm-chair and wondered how long it would be before her voice again summoned him. He asked himself, too, why the morphine had not done its work in more effective way. He had left the bottle, still three quarters full of it, on the small table at her bedside—the bottle which poor Whitewright had given him on the evening of his death. He had for-

gotten that he had left it there, but even if he had remembered this fact it would have been to him one of trivial import.

Of course, he told himself, there were people whom all anodynes refused to affect, just as there were others whom they made wakeful instead of somnolent. But Elma had already proved herself susceptible to bromides and other drugs of narcotic influence. Why, then, had these efforts of his to quiet her last moments with the mercy of morphine turned out so disastrously futile?

The whole day had been an arduous one to him, and it is not surprising that before long he fell into a kind of wakeful sleep, like that of a watching dog. His head dropped backward upon the tufted rear of the arm-chair, and in this posture it perhaps remained nearly an hour. He awoke from a grewsome dream in which his wife had stood before him, fearfully livid and haggard, with a scintillating knife whose point she held just over her heart, while she screamed in wrath and anguish, "You want me to die!"

He sat bolt upright in his chair, wide awake and listening. Not a sound. Had there been any cry from the next chamber? Surely no. Surely what he had heard came from the airy lips of dream alone. He rose, and passed to where Elma lay, pausing and listening at every third step, and treading with extreme lightness. If at last she really slept he should so hate to rouse her.

The sick-room was fairly well-lighted; Elma

had always detested darkness. As he drew near the bed he swiftly concluded that she still slept. Her head had sunk so deep into the pillow that a white rim of linen rose round it. Her attenuated neck made a concave line between chin and bosom. Suddenly, with a start, he hurried still nearer; he touched her. And then he knew.

To have been so confident it would come and yet to have it come with such appalling speed! He seemed to feel his blood stagnate while he stood and stared down at her. And then, as if that mouth, now eternally dumb, had moved again, he could almost have sworn that he heard—

"You want me to die!"

He shook off the ghostly effect of this delusion. His thoughts flew, in pity and dread, to her father. Of course he must be told at once. Was it best to ring for a servant, or go himself and face the old man's grief without delay? At this point his eye fell upon the small table beside the bed. The bottle which had held the morphine still stood there, but it was now completely empty.

He snatched it up, to make sure that he did not err. No; its label bore the name of poor Whitewright. She had drunk its contents. Even on the verge of a natural death, she had chosen to kill herself—willful, headstrong, capricious to the very last!

Horror-stricken, Moncrieffe stood motionless, with the bottle clutched in his hand.

A near door, leading into the outer hall, was

now softly opened. "Basil," said a low voice, which he at once recognized as Blagdon's.

He stayed irresolute for several seconds. Meanwhile his brain worked at hot speed. . . "Why let him know that she killed herself?—why let anybody know? Only to-day he heard me speak those random words for which he rebuked me so fiercely. Then, afterward, he heard her dreadful cry—he heard her say that I desired her death."

Moncrieffe had the empty bottle grasped at his side in one loose-hanging hand. Suddenly he thrust it into his pocket. Then he went and faced his father-in-law in the shadow of the half-opened door.

"Basil, how is she?" quavered Blagdon.

"The . . . the end has almost come, Mr. Blagdon."

"The end? Basil! You don't mean it!"

Blagdon was staggering as he jerked out this response. Moncrieffe put both arms about him.

"Sit down before you go to the bed. Wait a little. You can't do anything—you can't help her."

"Can't help her?"

"No. Wait here. Wait here, first, and compose yourself."

The old man would not acquiesce. He did not struggle, however, to reach his daughter's side. He merely envisaged Moncrieffe, and with this simple act showed him the full view of a face that for all its heavy commonplace of line and mold was one living bereavement.

"It's . . over . . then? She's dead?"

"Yes. She died very suddenly. It all came in a moment. I had no time to call."

Before the suffering in those ravenously ardent eyes, Moncrieffe dropped his own.

"Outrageous fortune," rang through his brain. "I shall be tortured, now, for an age to come, with the dread of having him suspect I killed her!"

XXV.

HERE he was in gross error, and soon told himself that the hysteric turbulence of the moment had caused him to wrong Elma's father. Blagdon showed not the faintest symptom of having suspected that his son-in-law had acted otherwise than as his daughter's vigilant well-wisher, up to the final moment of her life.

And yet Moncrieffe underwent secret tortures. He had not told Blagdon that Elma's death was caused by suicide, and he could not blame himself for having kept back from the sorrow-wrung old man this wretched fact. Nevertheless he felt burdened for days with the guiltiest of secrets. Say what one would, there had been at least a slim chance of her living for at least a certain time, and his own negligence, forgetfulness, carelessness, had caused her to pass away as she had done. For of course there could be no doubt that despairingly and wantonly she had seized the bottle and drained it to the dregs. To any physician examining her

body after death the evidence of her suicide would be manifest. And yet here was he, her husband, letting her go to her grave with the truth unconfessed!

In vain during the days that preceded her funeral, in vain during the solemn hours of the funeral itself, he kept repeating and re-repeating to his own thoughts that it had been his duty to shield her from the odium which would have clung about open disclosure. At times a certain stealthy and benumbing terror assailed him. Apart from her father, many others had doubtless grown aware of her burdensome and trying deportment as an invalid. The hired nurse had probably babbled of it; Blagdon himself, in garrulous moments with neighbors, had more than supposably touched upon it. The very air of Riverview had surely been impregnated with gossip concerning the hard life she had led him since their return from Europe. For that matter, his own incessant retirement must have told its tale.

What, then, if whispers *were* circulated about the manner of her death? She had killed herself, and no one else in the world knew it except him. She had killed herself, and ought he not to have revealed this truth? Ought he not to have revealed it in his rôle of physician—in his signing of her death-certificate? Had he the right to remain silent? Was he weak and womanish to cry “outrageous fortune” now? Was this really a new manifestation of that hostile force concerning which he had so con-

fidently theorized? Would dear dead Magnus have approved his silence? Oh, for Magnus to talk with in this grim ordeal!

On the very morning of the funeral he received a thrilling shock. He glanced over the sheets of a newspaper, and saw there the account of a poisoning-case which was causing wide and excited comment. A physician of repute in Brooklyn had been suspected of having caused his wife's death through morphine, and ten months after the woman's burial her body had been exhumed and traces of the drug found in the stomach of the corpse. Dr. Archibald's arrest had just occurred, and the pillars of respectability had been shaken. So stainlessly exemplary had many believed him that his threatened downfall was almost like a sudden collapse of the Brooklyn Bridge itself. There were sides passionately taken; a tremendous fight would soon engage the lawyers, and the coming trial promised to be a *cause célèbre* of unparalleled note.

The funeral—a very large one—was held at The Terraces. Moncrieffe caught glimpses of many familiar faces afterward, when certain services were read at the grave. Among these faces he saw Eloise's and Mrs. Thirlwall's and Dunstan's. The latter looked him full in the eyes for a second. The day overhead was cloudy, though rainless. Gusts drove through the graveyard paths, hurrying before them brittle swarms of rusted leaves. In this bleak and

austere weather Moncrieffe saw a semblance of Dunstan Thirlwall's chill visage.

"The man hates me still, I should say," he meditated. "Why should his hate persevere? One might think to-day would end it?"

Soon Moncrieffe might have found a cause for the continuance of this hate, if he had cared to seek one.

When he and his father-in-law returned to The Terraces a horrible oppressive stillness reigned there for both. Moncrieffe wondered what on earth his future position should now be. He had no idea of remaining in this grand mansion, nor did he imagine that Blagdon desired him to do so. The old man came home from the funeral in a mood of utter silence. He shut himself in his apartments, and refused to descend into the dining-room when dinner was served. Moncrieffe ate alone, therefore, and quite sparingly. Afterward he went upstairs and knocked softly at the door of Blagdon's bedroom.

"Well?" came a sad, tired voice.

Moncrieffe tried the door. It was locked. "Can I do anything for you?" he asked.

"No, no. It's you, Basil, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I guess I better keep alone till to-morrow. You've had your dinner, ain't you?"

"I've—well, yes, I've dined—after a fashion."

"All right. Don't let 'em send me anything. Just leave me alone. I'll try and brace up to-morrow. P'aps I can; I don' know. I'm laying down, now. I'll go to bed pretty soon, I

reckon. I'm all right. Don't worry about me, and don't send me any victuals. . . There, now; good-night, Basil."

"Good-night, sir."

Moncrieffe made up his mind, before retiring to his own room in the still, immense, lordly house, that he should pass a night of miserable wakefulness. On the contrary, he slept more serenely than he had done for weeks, and woke with queer conscience-stings because of the perfect rest he had enjoyed.

Blagdon had been up and about hours before he seated himself at the breakfast-table. Just as he rose from it, the old man joined him.

"Come in the li'bry, Basil, will you, please?"

Blagdon's manner was gentleness itself. They were seated together before he again spoke.

"I guess I'll stay here right along, Basil," he began. His face looked horribly ravaged, and his coloring, the tint of pale straw, brought into clearer relief the ponderous contour of cheeks and chin. "I been thinking about Paris, but I won't go there yet. *She* kind o' seems to be here, and I guess I'm going to like the sensation more as it keeps on. P'aps I'll get into a wagon pretty soon and go driving about, as I used to. I dare say I'll pull myself together more or less; folks mostly do after a knock-down like this. If I'd had a boy left, now—but, well, don't let's talk of that. . . The lawyers 'll be here by about noon, I guess. I know what will she made. Do you?"

"Will? No. Did she leave a will?"

As Moncrieffe spoke thus, in tones of the most natural surprise, he felt Blagdon's dull gaze focussed hardily on his face.

"Oh . . you didn't know she left any will, eh? Well, I know. She made it there on the other side. *Cartwright and Colgate* have got it now. It gives you the million dollars I gave her when she married you."

Moncrieffe turned pale; then, with brightening eyes and lips that twitched under the veiling of his beard, he said:

"You're quite sure of this? Quite sure?"

"She had the will drawn in Paris. I witnessed it. You're her sole heir. Every cent of the million's yours, and a good many thousands besides, for she hadn't begun to spend half what's come in since I settled the principal on her."

Moncrieffe slowly rose and went up to his father-in-law. "Mr. Blagdon," he said, "I want you to take it all back."

"Take it all back? Basil, are you crazy?"

The old man glared at him with eyes bulging dully from their sockets. An attitude of such renunciation as this was inconceivable to him. Till lately he had lived all his life among fellow-mortals with whom lucre was deity.

"Listen," said Moncrieffe, with soft firmness. "I had something when I married Elma; poor Magnus Whitewright, as I think you know, left me more. I now have an income beyond my actual needs. When the lawyers appear to-day we can quietly arrange, on my part, an act of reversion—"

"Good God!" broke in Blagdon. "I wouldn't consent to it for a million more! She'd—she'd . . ." He seemed hesitating for some cogent form of expression . . . "She'd haunt me nights if I did," he presently flashed out.

"Very well, then," said Moncrieffe, after a pause, as if he unlocked his lips to let each word pass through them; "I'll take the money, but I'll never touch a dollar of it."

"How's that?"

"I'll spend it all in charities."

Blagdon gave a blunt laugh. "Do as you please with it. It's yours. But I guess you'll keep it. Anyhow, remember this: you ain't going to give it back to me." His seamed face drooped a little, and his poor dim eyes visibly misted. "Poor darling! She'd come and scold me in my dreams. . . Look here, Basil, she always said you was one man in ten thousan'. Now I believe her. I don' know as I ever liked you half so good after you flared up that time in Paris. But I guess I been dead wrong about you. I s'pose I'd 'a' felt like telling you to keep mum even if poor El had half killed you in one of her tempers—God bless her, with all her faults! . . . There's my hand, Basil. She *was* right! They can't beat you. I see it. You don't care any more for that money than if 'twas so much old manure. But you got to take it—you *got* to, understand!"

A little later the lawyers came. . . Moncrieffe felt dazed when the simple yet formal proceedings were all over. He had himself driven, that

afternoon, to the picturesque little cottage in which Whitewright had died. Ann was still in charge. Everything looked precisely as if the dead might appear at any moment. Ann lighted some logs and fagots on the deep hearth of the sitting-room, and Moncrieffe sank into a chair, watching the pennons of flame they soon unfurled. He sat thus till the day waned into bluish dusk, and outside he could see the nude boughs of trees blacken against the glooming heaven.

He was now rich, independently, lavishly rich. And yet the woman had made him so who in life was jealous almost to madness of Eloise Thirlwall. The money had fallen to him from the skies, and yet it had brought with it no sense of either liberty or command. It seemed to rear, instead, a big barrier between himself and the one woman he had ever loved, a barrier none the less impermeable because golden. Greendingle, however much he might yearn to bend his steps thither, was for the present forbidden him. For the present! When would it be otherwise than forbidden? Would he ever feel justified, now, in asking Eloise to be his wife?

"Why not?" an opposing trend of reflection urged. "Hereafter—in two years, or at most three—you will have won the right of absolute self-mastership. Better to spend that interval in other lands. You can write Eloise a certain kind of letter. If she replies, you can gradually make plain to her, through subsequent

correspondence, that you care unchangeably, unconquerably for her love."

Then the sweet image of Mrs. Thirlwall would rise entreatingly before him. At least he was free now to go to her again. Did she not need him, and ought he not, in the name of his deep friendship for this loveliest of souls, go to her and make it plain that his future professional services were completely at her nod and beck?

Problem of problems! To appear just now at Greendingle would create a very cackle of gossip, since Riverview must already have said over its dinners and tea-drinkings and random reunions that he had paid hot court to Eloise till Elma Blagdon's money had tempted him into a desertion of her. Oh, yes; he knew, he knew! They had prattled like that, and they would prattle like that again. Then there was the possible indignant grief of Elma's father. Would not *he* shrink in horror from the idea of his son-in-law going to visit the house in which Eloise dwelt?

And yet, after all, why care if the whole of Riverview patriciandom broke into acrimonious ferment, why care if Blagdon should gnash rageful teeth?

"I'll go and see my dear friend, Mrs. Thirlwall," Moncrieffe decided, as he rose from his chair before the fire that was now a dreamy crimson of spent embers. "I'll go and see her, and I'll devote myself to the task of fortifying her, vivifying her, adding years (if this be not a futile venture) to her benign and valued

life. Let all Riverview hold up its hands in horror like a new Briareus; let Blagdon fume and even shriek disapprobation. The fact that Eloise is there has no more to do with my going than the fact that so clammy a being as Dunstan is there besides. It was well enough for me to stay away from my treasured friend while Elma lived. Now the case radically alters. I'll write her to-night. . . No, I won't write her to-night, anything of the sort. I'll go to her to-morrow."

He gave a last glance at the dying fire, and it appealed to him with a kind of melancholy, sanctioning resemblance to the face of his dead friend. He swept a glance round the still, void, familiar little room. "It's just as if Magnus were here, somewhere, nowhere, yet inexplicably *here*," he muttered, "and were telling me that I had made the bolder choice and hence the manlier and wiser one. . ."

But another hour altered his intrepid project. He went home to find a note from Mrs. Thirlwall waiting him there. She and Eloise and Anita were going South—to Charleston, Savannah, and possibly Florida—for several months. The plan had been slowly forming with her; she had got an invincible dread of the coming cold and snow. They would stay all winter—till April, at least. She gave him certain addresses; he must write now and then . . . would he not be good enough for that? She hated the journey, but she felt the strangest yearning for places where the leaves didn't fall

from their boughs, and one only had ice in one's lemonade, or some such refreshing potion; she was sure she would never want it even there. . . Dunstan would remain at Greendingle till they returned in the spring. This, of course, meant that he would occasionally give Riverview the preference over his chambers in town. . . Then followed a few words about the great loss and shock which Elma's death, so sudden even though anticipated so long, must have visited upon her father. There was not the smallest sentence concerning his own widowerhood. There was no reference to Eloise except the statement that she gladly acquiesced in the proposed trip. The letter closed somewhat abruptly, with a frank confession of fatigue, and a little postscript which told of how Anita was in a seventh heaven at the thought of going where she could see real oranges, big and juicy enough for anybody to eat, grow on real trees.

This letter, in the pangs it cost Moncrieffe, told him how keen had been his wish to see Eloise once again. Before another day passed he spoke with Blagdon about going abroad. The old man did not take kindly, at first, to this announcement. It was evident that he had expected a wholly different course on the part of his son-in-law—a year, at least, of monastic renunciation and retirement. This diversion and publicity of travel in foreign countries had for him a flavor of sacrilege. Still, he made no attempt to oppose Moncrieffe's plan, and even

counseled him, after the first flush of surprise, to carry it out.

"I guess you wouldn't have a very lively time, Basil, staying here and listening to me sing her praises all winter. For I do sing 'em; I know I do!" He shook his head with an air of self-convicting reverie. "I'm afraid all the neighbors round here will begin to think me an awful nuisance; they'll cross the road to get out o' my way. As soon as I meet a soul I begin—I can't help it. 'A pleasant day, Mr. Blagdon.' 'Yes, sir,' I say—and then I'm right off into talk about *her*. It's how she suffered, and how brave she was, and how little she complained, and how good and kind and sweet she always behaved to me."

"Heavens!" thought Moncrieffe, as he listened. "Let Byron's line be altered for evermore, and let it run—

'Believe a *father* or an epitaph.'"

"But you go, Basil," continued the old man; "just you suit yourself and go. I don't need you here; I don't need anybody. I got a few years left me, I s'pose, and I ain't going to be much good in 'em for anything except to make a kind of harmless crank o' myself, telling folks how my heart's broke, and showing 'em the pieces."

Within the next fortnight Moncrieffe sailed for Paris. Before doing so he wrote Mrs. Thirlwall, cordially though not at all at length, and giving her his banker's address. Paris was

leaden-skied and wintry when he reached it, and he remained there only a few days, pushing "down," as we Americans say, to Rome. Here the splendors of art and reminiscence, greatly though he enjoyed gazing upon them, were gloomed by an incessant taunt. He felt solemnly alone, and his loneliness could be mitigated in but a single way. There were times when he positively forgot that Elma had ever existed; only a physical sense of the great fatigue to which her long and irksome illness had subjected him now remained. A hungry yearning for the companionship of Eloise had asserted itself. Whenever he thrilled before some great painting or statue this longing was potently enkindled. He kept telling himself how Eloise would have loved all these inspiring sights, how her rich-lit eyes would have duplicated in symbol the sweet disarray of her entranced spirit. Phrases and words of hers came back to him; it was with him as if a door in his soul, which he himself had stoically shut against her and all that might concern her forbidden loveliness, were now reopened.

By about the beginning of March he reached Venice, having roamed with leisurely slowness the lower region of our world's most famed and historic peninsula. All this time he had been conscious of a lurking bodily distress, vague and yet onerous. He comprehended clearly that it was the result of his past racking experiences with Elma. It was lassitude, and at times it was also a hovering and inexplicable

pain. At Venice, a few days after he arrived there, it became tangible and enervating. He took to his bed, one afternoon, believing that the weakness and headache which were afflicting him would pass after an interim of reasonable rest. He had secured fortunate apartments that overlooked the Grand Canal; money he spent with a careless hand, nowadays, often thinking what joy it would have been to know that these heedless expenditures were productive of pleasure and ease to *her*. That same morning a letter from Mrs. Thirlwall had been handed to him. It was dated from Savannah, it softly raved over the climate there, and it amiably upbraided him for never having written.

"Dunstan informs me," it continued, "that you are still abroad. He merely stated this in reply to an inquiry I sent him. Occasionally, at Riverview, he has met Mr. Blagdon, who has told him that you are spending the winter in Italy. So you write to Mr. Blagdon and not to me! Well, I'm not blaming you for that, and Heaven knows I can feel with you in whatever pity the poor desolate old man may keep alive during your absence from him; for my son describes him as pathetically reminiscent of his lost child; he talks of nothing else, and talks of her as long as the patience of listeners will permit. You know Dunstan's languid sympathies and general cynic outlook. I was amazed to learn from him that after meeting your father-in-law twice (once at the post-office in the village and once while driving near his home) a

little series of visits had been the result. Think of it; is it not odd? Dunstan has gone to The Terraces and smoked a cigar, two or three evenings, in Mr. Blagdon's library. When one thinks, when one remembers, this development seems pregnant (pray does it not?) with the most curious and irritating comedy. Eloise and I have puzzled our wits for some solution of the droll mystery. That Dunstan should so occupy himself, he who has more than once wounded me by insolent unconcern of his elders, he whom it bores to exchange more than a sentence with nine-tenths of the people he meets!

"There! I have mentioned Eloise's name, and I am constrained, somehow, to re-write it. My pen defies discipline; it will have its way; you see, it has already forced me to do its bidding. And so, my dear friend, I must confess to you that I have told my niece everything you told me on a certain day at Greendingle. I mean, of course, about the letter you had written her, about your summons to The Terraces, about the action pursued by that strangely obdurate girl (peace rest her!) who afterward became your wife. Eloise listened, and in her altering face I saw immense pity. Then pity changed to relief, and I watched two tiny stars of joy swim up into her dear shadowy eyes. I think she understands it all now. I don't know if she blames you still. I have never heard her breathe a word of blame at any time. Perhaps she has suffered far more than I could detect. But I know she has suffered greatly, in silence

and in secrecy. Let me assure you of this: the keynote of her charming nature is constancy, and forgiveness is one of her loveliest graces. Ah, Basil Moncrieffe, if I could live to see you her husband! In some people these lines I am writing would wake a sneer. Such people would say that I am simply swayed by the most selfish forces. They would be quite right. Why should I not want my treasured Eloise to marry the man whom I believe she loves with a large and noble passion?—the man of whom I am certain that he loves *her*, clingingly and inalienably, despite that despotism of untoward fate which he has made so clear to me and in which my woman's heart believes at this moment with intensest faith! Again and again I have lived through that episode which you described to me with such quiet yet vivid eloquence. Again and again I have felt that what others might have condemned in you as culpable passivity was neither more nor less than the uncontrollable yielding to that same 'outrageous fortune' in whose 'slings and arrows' your self-defensive arguments have taught me firmly to believe. . . . And now, as to my health, in which you have long taken so tender and comforting an interest. I have my good days, my better ones and my best ones. During the first I fear that I selfishly long for you as a physician; during the second I desire you as physician and companion interblent; during the third I crave merely the delicate luxury of your friendship. In this bland air

what talks and strolls we could have together! How I would love to discuss with you the life of Magnus Whitewright, your vanished friend, and seek to reach, through your aid, some sort of conclusion as to the real worth of his magnificently self-effacing philosophy! . . .”

And so the letter ran on, rich to Moncrieffe with suggestion and delight. But already the leveling prostration had laid hands on him, and when fever and delirium were born of it, slight wonder that he raved to his watchers of Eloise’s pardon and her unperished love. He might as well have spoken of Saturn and his rings, for all that his Italian custodians understood of what he wildly vented; for he had traveled in simple style, without a servant, not yet having sunk into any easeful ruts plowed by the unaccustomed force of his new-gained wealth.

It was a frightful illness, and his recovery from it lasted for weeks. Midsummer was regnant over Venice before he awoke to any sane comprehension of the dimness which the Valley of the Shadow had cast upon him. And then midsummer lapsed into autumn before he had regained his lost strength.

It was lucky that this measurably came back to him in time for certain tidings, by which he was met on the first day of his return to Paris. Otherwise the effect might have been fatal—for they were tidings that made his head swim giddily and flooded his eyes with tears.

XXVI.

ELOISE had written him, and at Riverview. She and Anita had recently arrived there from Savannah. They had borne with them the dead body of Mrs. Thirlwall. The letter had been delayed at his banker's for months.

"Sudden death," Eloise wrote, "has always seemed to me unutterably horrible. And yet Aunt Emily, though she died with great suddenness, died with surpassing peace. She had just taken a stroll with Anita and myself through the quaint and quiet Southern town. I had never for weeks known her spirits more flashingly lively. For some reason she chose to speak of the different outlooks from which different people of strong temperament regard life. Your dead friend, Magnus Whitewright, had always interested her, and she said that she envied him the grand poise and security of his resignation. 'But it came,' she pursued, 'from too contemptuous an estimate of his fellow-men. Not that he meant it for contemptuous,' she added, 'since indeed I am sure that he meant it for a justice inflexibly strict. He had made up his mind that we are all no larger than we might look from the top of Mount Blanc, at which height, if one could view us at all, one would not find that a Newton was discernible from an idiot. It's a melancholy view to take of us, but may not the view of humanity itself toward itself be the

most intemperate of misconceptions?' . . . I answered her heatedly, and told her that I believed we could never sufficiently revere the angelic element which lurked within us, the possibility of self-elevation which might climb to the feet of our Creator and gain, through the patience and bravery of having thus sought Him face to face, an exquisite surety that many baffling mysteries would hereafter be unraveled for us. . . My aunt smote me laughingly on the cheek and called me a transcendentalist of the true type. 'Perhaps you get nearer to the solving of the great problem, you and your trustful, emotional kind,' she said, 'than any of us who are proud with our brains rather than humble with our hearts.' And in a little while she began to speak of you; and Anita, who had been rather pensive though not in the least peevish, as she walked between us, brightened at your name. 'I wish Dr. Moncrieffe were here!' cried my cousin. 'So do I,' said Aunt Emily, 'so do I,' with a sudden inflection of odd, wild tenderness that yet rings in my ears. Then, much more soberly, she spoke of your having told her" (Eloise's writing became a little erratic, at this point, varying from its graceful precision and showing one or two salient erasures) "that you believed in an evil destiny controlling our deeds, against which all personal struggle was powerless. 'That is another outlook upon life,' she said, 'and who shall dare state that it is a fallacious one?' I answered her (quite daringly and illogically, you may think) that to me it was very

fallacious indeed. I said that I was as certain of goodness in the world as I was certain of light in the sky, and that just as I accepted shadow as the natural result of light and the inseparable companion of it, so I accepted calamity as the natural result and inseparable companion of happiness. 'Ah,' she replied, 'that is picturesque, but it is not convincing. Why the light if also the shadow? Why the happiness if also the calamity? That God of yours' (I hated to have her call Him that God of *mine*!) 'might have made a perfect world if He had chosen.' And again I answered her, perhaps too heatedly this time: 'If I questioned God's intent I should not love Him. For it is His intent and not His power that I love. If He were not almighty I should love Him no less than I do now. Perhaps He even tried to make that perfect world and could not . . . who knows? But in that case I should love Him as much because He tried and failed as I love Him now because I am certain that He had no need of either trying or failing and that we shall understand soon or late the mighty Why of His having had no such need.' . . . She seemed to like these words, and it struck me as queer that they should please her, for often she would flare up into a kind of pleasant haughtiness when I spoke like this, and say to me that I read too little and thought too little on these great subjects, after the fashion of all fanatical pietists, or give me some such chiding though half-playful reply. But now I heard her softly repeat certain fragments of what I had

been saying, as we walked on in silence. Toward the end of our walk she complained of feeling tired, and when we reached home she at once sank on a lounge and lay there quite still, as I had often seen her do before. Only yesterday we had decided that the weather was growing too warm for us to remain much longer in Savannah. But this evening the air was enchantingly fresh, and yet balmy enough for a big window at her side to be left open. Directly in front of this window was a grove of superb magnolias, and between their stems the spring day—that incomparable spring day of the South!—died in a splendid cloud-tangle of lavender, silver and scarlet.

“Something made me go to her side and slip my hand in hers. She started, and averted her eyes from the sunset, which was not dazzling any longer, though a minute before it had been fiercely so, while yet possible to watch because of the great curving magnolia-leaves. ‘Aunt,’ I said, ‘are you more tired than usual?’ She laughed ever so faintly at this, and said: ‘Dear Eloise, you speak as if I were always tired.’ I at once said, ‘Oh, aunt, you’re the most animated of beings nearly always; but sometimes, you know—’ And there I paused. Her paleness frightened me. She slowly turned her eyes toward the sunset again, and to my surprise I heard her murmur my own recent words: ‘*If He were not almighty I should love Him no less than I do now. Perhaps He even tried to make that perfect world and could not . .*

who knows ? . . . ‘Aunt!’ I suddenly called. But she did not answer. I leaned over the couch, and shot a glance down at her face, smitten by the drowsy afterglow. Her eyes had closed, and a smile had slightly cleft her lips. These signs would not have told me. What told me was her unearthly pallor. . . Nothing is at all clear to me for hours afterward. People in the hotel were very kind and merciful. They said that I was calm and did not weep much. . . One of them, an elderly man, who luckily had business in the North, came on with Anita and me. Telegrams were sent to Dunstan. He met us at the railway terminus near New York. We had brought *her*. Dunstan has been cold, as usual, but not ungracious. I am at Greendingle now, and write these lines on the evening of the day of the funeral. I would like to tell you more, but my hand will scarcely let me, for I am so debilitated, so unstrung.”

Soon after this the letter abruptly ended. “And months,” thought Moncrieffe, “have elapsed since Eloise wrote me these pages!”

There were other letters, and among them three or four from his father-in-law, all brief and all full of surprise that he himself had not written. On the following day, Saturday, a steamer would sail from Havre. Moncrieffe engaged passage upon it and reached it just in time.

“How,” he kept asking himself all through the voyage, “shall I find that matters have

turned out between Dunstan and his cousin? Has the brute in him risen predominant? Is poor Eloise torn from Anita and forced to seek refuge Heaven knows where? In what miserable state of penury, of despondence, may I not light upon her?" . . .

Meanwhile the fortunes of Eloise had been wrapped in no such somber terrors as those which Moncrieffe had imagined. It took the girl - two or three days after the funeral of her aunt to realize that Dunstan had decided to treat her with sullen yet distinct courtesy. She marveled at his motive for thus disporting himself. Mrs. Thirlwall's will, when opened, showed that she had left money to her niece which would give a life-income of twenty-five hundred dollars a year. This to Eloise meant exquisite relief. But she waited almost breathlessly, after hearing the tidings, for some ireful act on the part of her cousin. None came. Was she to be separated from poor, clinging, motherless little Anita? No such mandate met her. Was she to be exiled once and for all from dear old Greendingle? Apparently her continued residence there would be sanctioned until that horrible railway caused the complete demolition of the family home.

Dunstan would now and then speak of his negotiations with the company, and the great price which he might soon receive from it. Eloise, too comforted by his toleration of her presence, ventured to ask but a few vague questions. All through the summer she felt, some-

how, that in one respect at least the ground was growing firmer beneath her feet; that the tragedy of having her helpless little Anita ravished from her looked less and less imminent as days passed by. So acute was the thankfulness thus created in her that she often failed to feel the full poignance of that disappointment which Moncrieffe's unexplained silence had roused.

Dunstan paid decorous heed to the term of his mourning; he abjured Newport, this summer, just as inflexibly as he abjured gold shirt-studs. But he made frequent trips into town and stayed there for days at a time. The selectest and smallest of his clubs knew him, though he avoided the larger ones. He would often go down-town into the offices of lawyers and brokers, discussing with them investments, purchases or sales. He had now full control of his late father's property, and though the handling of Eloise's legacy had been placed by the terms of his mother's will in other hands than his own, he more than once looked after the regular payment of her monthly returns.

When at Greendingle he was grave and taciturn with Eloise, but never palpably uncivil. She took the place at table which her dead aunt had vacated; he allowed her to retain it, and seated himself opposite her, while Anita's chair was between them. At first these occasions were keenly trying to his cousin, but after a while she began to accept them with a certain stolid security. She and he would be thus confronted only at dinner-time, and then the ordeal

gradually lost its irksome pungency, and became tedium, humdrum yet quite unformidable. The long silences grew by degrees less awkward and onerous. She no longer felt that they might be broken by some eruption of Dunstan's old insolence or cynicism. Beyond doubt this new head of the family was letting things go placidly on.

But letting things go placidly on to what terminus, what ultimatum? Eloise sometimes asked herself this question in nervous alarm. What motive lay hid beneath his colorless quiescence? Did any motive underlie it? Was he acting a part? By September she had got to be hopefully dubious on these points; and yet the doubt often sang gnatlike in the ears of her spirit.

The truth was, Dunstan Thirlwall's deep hate of Moncrieffe had in strange way reacted beneficially to his cousin. It was hate of a vast dimension, and the psychological marvel that so small a nature could accommodate it might well be matter for dismay. Elma's death had fed it with new and vicious vitality. This event appealed to Dunstan as the very crowning grace of luck when viewed in relation to the fortune which had gone along with it. He learned of the fortune through Blagdon, during those visits of which we have heard. His primary motive for going to The Terraces after having met the old man on one of the Riverview roads had been actual hunger of curiosity. He wanted to find out if these reports were true which claimed that Elma had left a million to her husband. It

bored him distressingly to talk with the old man at all. He thought him dull and vulgar past expression, and nothing that he said struck him as in the faintest degree either droll or clever. No one whom he did not think "refined" and "well-bred" ever interested him in the least. He would have subjected Elma, if he had married her, to a course of rigorous training in manners—or tried to do so.

Blagdon, during those visits at The Terraces, was mournfully garrulous. He spoke of his child's married life as though it had been, on her own side, one of shining saintliness. At length an adroit question or two made him disclose the exact amount of her wifely bequest. Sitting in that somber and charming library, Dunstan felt a new stab of jealous loathing.

That night he slept fitfully, and passed more than a single hour in brooding rancor. His detestation of the calm and easy conquest which Moncrieffe had secured over him took huge and eerie proportions. Naturally a thirst for vengeance followed these viperous moods. Both in the country and in town he would find himself musing on a possible way to dim the luster of so calmly insolent a triumph. The very romanticism of his hate at times evoked from him prosaic humor. He would stroll, rather late at night, into an almost void little club—the little club that he liked best because so intensely devoted to the daintiness of class and so abhorrent of the mass, in all such manifestations of it as feeling and passion and the nudity of undraped

nature. And here the very decorum of the well-trained waiters, the very quietude of the mossy-carpeted chambers, the very sense everywhere of order and elegance and repose, would create a kind of mockingly grave background for the self-admitted flamboyance of his hate.

And yet, scoff it as he would, the hate still abode with him. It somehow seemed, one evening, to drag him again to The Terraces. Blagdon welcomed him with an unexpected affability, and asked with bluff warmth about his absent relatives. They soon drifted again into the stately and dusky library, of whose delicious hanging and carvings, as it seemed to Dunstan, his host was no more aware than if they had been calico and commonest pine. Inevitably Blagdon began to talk of his dead child. He had been reading two or three books on the disease from which she died, and he now spoke of her sufferings as if with a sort of resentful scowl at Providence for having made them so exceptionally harsh.

"Was no morphine ever given her?" Dunstan here asked.

"Well, you see," came the slow answer, "Basil used to be afraid of it. She kept wanting it and begging for it, but he didn't give her the least speck till that last day."

"Yes . . . I see. And then he did give it?"

"So he told me."

"And it brought relief?"

Blagdon shook his head, in pensive rumination. "He couldn't see as it did. He wondered

why, and he couldn't make the thing out at all."

"Really?" fell from Dunstan. "You mean that the drug failed of effect?"

"Yes. I guess it did." Blagdon stared at the floor, and then raised his eyes to the ceiling and stared roamingly at that. "I—guess—it must have. It don't catch on to some people. I s'pose you know about my patent medicines. I never dared to so much as even *touch* it in *them*. But, anyhow, it didn't do that dear child o' mine a bit of good till just at the last."

"The last?" questioned Dunstan. He echoed these two words with an accent crisp and sharp.

Blagdon started a little, and looked at him full. "Why, yes," he murmured, in his mournful, pausing way, "why, yes. Basil had got almost crazy with her. She wouldn't see any other doctor, you know, and she just laid there in awful pain."

"M—m—yes. Ah . . . M—m—yes. Dr. Moncrieffe, you say, had become—er—almost crazy?"

"Sure enough, Mr. Thirlwall, sure enough! And I don't wonder. Why, she wouldn't even let *me* come into the room *that* day!" piped the old man, pitifully oblivious of all former days when a like prohibition was operative.

"This," said Dunstan, after quite a long silence, "is an exceedingly nice cigar, Mr. Blagdon."

The old man brightened vaguely, and recrossed his legs. "I'm glad you like it, I'm glad you like it. I have 'em here, but I don't smoke 'em.

I don't smoke any more at all. It makes me nervous nowadays, so I quit it. They're Basil's, those cigars are; he had 'em sent up from the city a little while before he sailed, and afterward I guess he must have forgot 'em."

"Indeed?"

Dunstan felt like flinging the rich-tinted olive-and-brown thing from which he had been puffing pleasant fumes into the big fireplace where some ruddy logs were flaming. But he kept it decorously between thumb and finger while he pursued, as if musingly:

"And when death came to your daughter it was—er—quite sudden, was it not?"

"Oh, like a flash. She went right off in no time at all. Even Basil didn't know. The morphine, you see, had quieted her at last, and he'd gone into the other room. He says he fell into a kind of doze, and waked all of a sudden—a cat-nap, you know."

"Yes. Well?"

"He got up and went back into the room where she was laying, and then he saw, right in a second, that 'twas all over . . . all over." Blagdon here drooped his head again, and spoke with a solemn monotony. "I guess I was pretty foolish when I got the news. I felt like hitting poor Basil, but I just kept quiet and tried to steady my jumping nerves as well as I could. . . . You see, we'd had a kind of a growl, him and I, a little while before. He'd come out o' the sick room and said to me. . . . I can remember his exact words. . . . He'd said to me, 'This

is almost the end, now, and thank God for it.' ”

“Yes? Really? He said that? How odd!”

Blagdon shot a slant look into his guest's composed face. “Oh, but he didn't *mean* it, you know, Basil didn't! He only thought, you understand, about the relief she'd get from her mis'ry.”

“Quite so.”

“And then, after that—after we'd made up, and I'd got to feel pretty well ashamed o' myself, and he'd told me how he'd been trying morphine on her all that day, and how it didn't seem to work right, I—I got another queer shock.” At this point the voluble old man rubbed his face, with the double-handed gesture of one washing it. He gave something between a sigh and a yawn as he went on: “Oh, I blab too much. I d'clare it's getting babyish of me—downright babyish.”

“You spoke of receiving another shock,” said Dunstan, as carelessly as a covert excitement would allow.

“A shock? No, I didn't, did I? . . . Oh, yes,” and Blagdon laughed drearily. “Poor El, poor darling El, she was kind of out of her head, that night, you see, and no wonder, no wonder. . . I happened to come into her room. I knew she didn't want me, or anybody but Basil, not even the nurse. But I heard her moaning, and I was outside in the hall, waiting there for some news, better or worse, and expecting worse every second, and her moans got

louder, and so I slipped in. And as I did that she wailed out, 'You want me to die!' It went through me just like a knife, and it give me a kind o' tigerish feeling to Basil."

"Yes—yes—of course."

"But I was over it all in a minute. . . I don' know what made me think of it now, except that I ain't ever so contented, somehow, as when I'm running on and on with my gabble about that poor dear girl. O' course she didn't know a word o' what she was telling him. That stands to reason; for I will say it of Basil that a kinder, watchfuler, tenderer husband than him never drew breath. . ."

As a rule Dunstan Thirlwall was a good sleeper. People of his sluggish mind and healthful frame usually are. But to-night he lay awake for a good while and felt his nerves tingling, through this term of insomnia, with a strange, insidious, exhilarant hope.

XXVII.

COULD it have been possible?

This question kept haunting Dunstan as a fly haunts a wound. From one point of view suspicion seemed absurd; from another it wore justifying tinges. That "thank God!" of Moncrieffe's and that woful plaint of Elma's were surely packed with convicting hints.

Intense hate, in minds of no imagination,

crawls, drowns and broods. It never makes for itself pictures and portraits of its own destructive longings; it lives on, sleepily and yet malignly, like a sore that will not heal, yet not like a cancer that strikes fibers of sure though sullen death into the organism its wicked fangs have clutched. It is the opposite of its blithe sister, love, which can almost deify (for a time, at least) the most torpid of natures. Love puts imagination into the dullest oaf. He sees the stars for the first time in his earthward-gazing life, and he hears in the pastoral prattle of a wayside brook the laughter of nymph and oread.

Dunstan would never have dreamed of suspecting, that Moncrieffe's last hours with his wife might have been colored by crime if to this rankling hate of his a certain bit of reigning newspaper sensationalism had not forcibly spoken.

It was the Archibald poisoning case, and it still held the public heed with a retentive grip. The body of Dr. Archibald's wife had shown evidence of morphine to a degree that threatened with disgraceful death a man hitherto respected by thousands and beloved by hundreds. The trial had thrall'd public attention in a rare way. It had just begun, and it threatened to last for weeks. "There is nothing less improbable," Dunstan would muse, "in the idea of *that* physician having killed his wife through the facilities afforded by his place as watcher at her bedside, than in the idea that Moncrieffe took a similar course."

Before long he began to yearn with profoundest desire that this "upstart" who had slipped ahead of him, thrust him aside, slapped him in the face, might have steeped himself in undiscovered crime. He had felt sure that Moncrieffe loved Eloise, months before he became so suddenly engaged to Elma Blagdon. What was more supposable than that he should have seen a nice and safe chance of cutting the slender thread between himself and opulent freedom? Blagdon, it was true, had droned on about his devotion and fidelity. Things like these had already been said concerning the criminal now so conspicuous. Had Dr. Moncrieffe's life and record been cleaner than those of Dr. Archibald? They had certainly not been half so celebrated.

If Dunstan had not thought that his abhorred foe would return, sooner or later, to Riverview with an intent of meeting and perhaps marrying Eloise, he would doubtless have treated his cousin far less courteously after she returned from Savannah with the mournful burden of his mother's corpse. As it was, he found himself waiting, waiting, always waiting, for Moncrieffe's reappearance and his prompt consequent evidence that Eloise was unforgotten.

Then came the wearisome summer, during which he told himself that Moncrieffe never meant to return at all. "He's off there with fifty thousand a year, and he'll stay," Dunstan gloomily thought. "*I'd* stay, if I were he. What's Eloise to him now? What would any Eloise be to *me* if I'd all that money and all

Europe to choose new loves and diversions from?"

The tidings of Moncrieffe's return gave a fresh thrill to his hate. Affairs at Greendingle were going on decorously enough. He had begun to call himself a fool for even fancying that Moncrieffe would come back at all, when one day it struck him as the better sort of policy to say to Eloise at the close of an habitually tedious dinner: "Ah—er—by the by—did you hear that Moncrieffe had got back from the other side?"

Eloise paled, then flushed. "No, Dunstan, I hadn't heard."

Anita, seated at her side, broke forth in rapid tremolo: "Dr. Moncrieffe's back? Oh, I'm so glad! Will he be here soon?" And then the dwarfish little shape nestled itself close to Eloise, as if in fear of having offended by this unwary outburst.

"I dare say you'll hear quite soon," said Dunstan, absorbedly cracking a walnut with one of the silver implements designed for such employ. "It's quite probable, isn't it, that he'll look you up soon?"

"I don't know; I—I can't be at all sure of it," replied Eloise, flushing again, and stammering.

Moncrieffe spent a day in New York, going promptly the next morning to his father-in-law at Riverview. Blagdon received him with consternation and not a little cordiality.

"I'd have skipped right acrost, Basil," he at length said, after having listened for a good

while with earnest attention, "if I'd only known you was so sick. But the devil of it's been that I didn't know you had an ache nor a pain. I just s'posed you'd got kiting round there, and hadn't remembered me—or, to put it funny but nearer what I mean—that you'd forgot to remember me."

"I remembered not to forget you," said Moncrieffe, seriously. "That's an equally funny way of putting it, but a decidedly truer one."

Blagdon's diffuse loquacity soon struck him as almost infantile, and he wondered, after an interim of observant silence, if the old man's brain had not become unbalanced by his morbid and phenomenal grief. He rambled on about Elma's last hours till they became piercingly re-apparent to his hearer. He spoke of his belief that she sometimes visited him in dreams, and of his intention to seek a spiritualistic medium as soon as he could find one of good repute. At last he mentioned the visits paid him by Dunstan. "He's a pretty fair sort of chap, after all, Basil," next came the comment. "He seemed to feel it real painful when I told him how El suffered before she went."

"I don't believe he cared how she suffered," said Moncrieffe, with sternness. "I don't believe, Mr. Blagdon, that he ever cared how anybody suffered."

"Whew! You *ain't* friends, *are* ye? Still, I didn't hear him—er—say one word, Basil—"

"Against *me*? Why should he? I've never wronged him in the faintest way. Though

neither, for that matter, has the good and lovely girl, his cousin, Eloise Thirlwall."

Blagdon pulled down the corners of his mouth. "A sort of a left-handed cousin, ain't she?"

Moncrieffe felt the color fly into his cheeks. "Call her so if you like," he said, very restrainedly. "That curse of her birth makes her to me only more interesting, more distinctive. She's a sweet and noble young woman, and I hope with all my heart that she hasn't been forced to endure any shocking persecution from Dunstan."

"It ain't got round if she has," returned Blagdon, a little curtly.

"She's still living there at the old place?"

"Yes. She's there. O' course you know that Mrs. Thirlwall died down South somewheres about last spring?"

"Yes. She wrote me."

"Oh," said Blagdon, with a frosty little smile. "So you and her corresponded, then?"

"She wrote me one letter. It was never answered; my illness prevented. She told me of her aunt's death, and how she had been left, by Mrs. Thirlwall's will, independent in a modest way. That's all I know, and her letter was written months back. If you've learned anything of how she's getting on there at Greendingle I should be very glad indeed to hear it."

"Me? I don't know anything, except that she's there still. The place'll be sold pretty soon, and a big price 'll be given for it. The new railway folks are going to begin by next spring, and they want to run right through the middle of

the Thirlwall estate. I ain't seen Dunstan for a good while now. But it's dead sure he's got to sell, and I shouldn't be surprised to hear most of the papers had been drawn up. All the kicking here in Riverview's ended, and the company is going to gut a big slice o' the graveyard and do gen'rally just what it's a mind to."

This same afternoon Moncrieffe resolved to appear at Greendingle. But he had no wish that the least secrecy should invest his going thither. Soon after luncheon he gave an order to one of the servants, and had a carriage brought to the front entrance. Just as he was leaving the hall his father-in-law came in from one of those aimless roamings about the grounds which not seldom would make the gardeners there watch him dubiously, since he so often muttered aloud to himself in gruff monotone.

"You're going out riding, Basil?" he now asked.

"Yes." For a moment Moncrieffe hesitated. "I'm going to drive over and see Miss Thirlwall and poor little Anita."

"Oh. . . You *are*? . . . Well. . ."

This was all that Blagdon said, but while Moncrieffe stepped into the carriage he felt almost as if he had received some stinging sarcastic rebuff.

When he found himself within the untended, familiar lawns of Greendingle a rush of memories almost unmanned him. The day was full of melancholy winds and mutable, rolling, bluish clouds. As he neared the house he shivered one

minute with sorrowing remembrance of Emily Thirlwall, that powerful, sincere spirit which had now forever gone away into the mystery it had so often forlornly pondered, and the next minute he thrilled with joyous expectation of seeing Eloise once again.

To enter the large, placid, homelike hall was to relive that last tumultuous meeting with the sweet, ill-starred girl for whose presence he now longed. As he dropped into a chair among those that stretched their arms to him amid the pleasant, appealing, unforgotten sitting-room, it swept through his mind: "Will she not feel as keenly as I that the last time we exchanged words together I told her? . . . What *were* my words? Oh, yes, I have them back, every syllable! I told her she was the one woman on earth that I could and did love perfectly—the one woman on earth that I should go on loving perfectly while life was left me!

"She called me cowardly," his musings pursued, while he waited for her to appear. "She called me cowardly, or at least she more than implied this was her thought of me. And yet, dear girl, she forgave me—she forgave me, or she would not have written as she did! . . . And now I come to her free, and after a year of release from that former terrible bondage!" He lowered his head, as if weighed upon by a sudden heavier and gloomier force of reverie. "My belief, my theory, my pessimism, if one wills to call it so? That imp of the air, whose maneuvers and machinations I've so stoutly persisted in

crediting—what power to spoil my future may he yet reserve? What lightning-bolt from what stormless heaven may still be waiting me, what shipwreck on what quiet sea?"

The sound of a coming step set his pulses a-leap, and he knew, when presently shaking hands with Eloise, that his agitation must be clear to her.

As far as he could afterward recollect, his first words were full of compassionate regret. "I fear you must have thought me very cold and indifferent during all your late sorrow and trouble!"

"I wondered . . I wondered," she began. . . Then suddenly her eyes widened. "You've been ill!" she exclaimed.

"Am I so altered as that?"

"You're not as you were." Here a laugh fluttered sad and sweet from her parting lips with what seemed to him the richest unconscious charm; no bird ever mounted from its nest with lovelier grace. "Oh," she went on, sweeping his face with a timid boldness of survey, "I am sure that you must have been very ill indeed!"

"It's thinned me. It's hoar-frosted my hair and beard. Do you mean that it has aged me besides?"

"It has made you different—left its mark." Her gaze was burningly earnest as she went on: "And are you quite rid of it now?"

"Oh, yes, I'm well. I'm *almost* well at last." Then he spoke for some time, secretly

watchful of how intently her mobile features told him that she was listening.

"Terrible!" she at length sighed. "And you were so alone—so alone in a strange land!"

"Hardly more alone than you were when your poor aunt died."

"True—true. But it was not so far away."

"You could get back home; I couldn't. I had to stay where I was and dream dreams of being buried in Italian soil. You could slip up North again" (here he made his voice intentionally ironical) "to Dunstan."

She started, then drooped her eyes to where both hands lay in the lap of her simple black dress. "Dunstan has treated me very well. We have got on together much better than I dreamed of expecting."

"He's civil, then? He's human *and* civil, both? He's not the arrogant and insolent fellow of old?"

"He's not in the least what he was. Even little Anita has in a measure lost her fear of him. . . . She's out walking, just now, with Margaret. Poor little Nita! She's so fond of you! She'll be inconsolable when I tell her that you came."

He gave a nod, brief and brusque. "I'm not sorry she's away. How can I be? I came to see *you*—only you."

As she answered him, Eloise was smoothing composedly one of the black plaits at the front of her frock. Between a laugh and a slight frown of mock petulance, she said:

"You tell me so with a sort of military manner, really! You make one feel like a soldier on duty."

"Does my tone sound over-severe, then, after the great amiability of your cousin?"

"Don't sneer at Dunstan—pray don't! It seems like quarreling with my good luck. . . I confess to you," she went on, with her lips now an anxious curve, "that my to-morrows begin to brim with omen."

"And why?"

"Greendingle is virtually sold to those railway people. Dunstan will of course live permanently in town when there's no longer a home in River-view."

"And your aunt?" said Moncrieffe, striving to speak very tranquilly, and succeeding. "Has she left you dependent on *him*?"

"No. I have twenty-five hundred a year, or thereabouts, from what she saved for me. Dunstan has never shown the least umbrage because of her will."

"How gracious of him! Then you're your own mistress, though not in any handsome sense."

She raised one hand, with contradicting import. "It's ample. I can live *very* comfortably on it."

"In a boarding-house," he muttered.

She laughed faintly. "*Life* is a boarding-house, for that matter. Oh, I've not the faintest fear of going into one. I'll change and change till I find one that pleases me. But I want to

bring little Nita, too." Her eyes clouded and moistened; he saw her lower lip slide, for an instant, beneath its mate. Then, with a slight toss of the head and a full though worried smile, she continued: "But he *will* not take that poor little creature from me! I won't believe it! At least, I won't believe it till the time comes! . . . There!" she finished, mock-merrily, "that's my only dread on the subject of leaving Greendingle, though of course I shall miss the dear old place beyond words!"

Moncrieffe was slowly passing one hand over his forehead. "It's too bad you can't feel quite confident that Anita will be spared to you," he said. "Might you not ask Dunstan . . . or do you feel afraid to ask him? . . . whether . . . ?"

And then, in a sort of whitish mist he saw Eloise's face bending over him, and felt her hand clutch one of his own, tensely, just between wrist and palm.

"Dr. Moncrieffe! You're ill! Shall I—?"

"No, no." He lifted his head from the sofa-cushion behind him, on which it had fortunately fallen. "I'm all right, now. These attacks are a souvenir of that hateful fever. Do I look pale?"

"Yes," she said, excitedly. "Shan't I get you something? Brandy, or something like that? Let me ring—"

"Thanks." He was clasping her hand, and its delicate warmth seemed to strengthen him strangely, deliciously. Her lips were so near his face that he not only could feel their breath on his cheek but tell how quick that breath was

pulsing. "It's best for me to take no stimulant; you see, a physician knows himself; he can't very well help it. In Venice, even after I'd begun to sail abroad on the canals, and take long strolls, too, I would have half a dozen of these turns every day. The voyage made me feel much stronger, and I really am a cured man. But it will be a good year, I suppose, before I'm perfectly recovered again."

Then he saw how pale his own pallor had rendered her, and as the beloved face was so very near, he touched it with his lips.

"Eloise, I told you once how I loved you! I had no right to tell you then! Now I can speak without fear of wounding you, and with ah, such an ardent hope of giving you joy instead of pain! For I've come here, Eloise, with the one chief aim and intent of asking you to be my wife!"

The shrewdest of tacticians in love-making could not have lighted on a more opportune moment. Eloise had no answer for him in words, but her eyes were each a sentence in itself—a sweet, luminous epigram of concession, teeming with uncontrollable eloquence.

XXVIII.

SEVERAL more visits had been paid by Moncrieffe to Greendingle before Eloise confessed to

him a certain truth. "I could never have consented to marry you—never, never," she averred, "if Aunt Emily had not told me of how you came to be Elma Blagdon's husband."

"And she wrote me that she had told you," he answered. "I suppose the knowledge made me brave."

He had seen Anita, and received a rapturous welcome from her, but Dunstan had not yet chosen to appear during his visits. "I wish to see your cousin," he said to Eloise. "It is best that he should know of our engagement before any one else learns of it. You say he is in town this morning?"

"Yes; but by to-morrow I am sure he will have returned; for I heard him say that the final transfer of the estate would take place to-morrow morning, and that he expected quite a little crowd of lawyers and railway men to be present."

"To-morrow, in the afternoon, then," said Moncrieffe, "I shall hope to find him here. Tell him so, will you please?"

Meanwhile Blagdon had grown more and more grim of demeanor. Moncrieffe suspected that the old man had learned from the coachman who had now quite often driven him to Greendingle, of how he had really thus often been going thither. This knowledge, in whatever way imparted, might explain his father-in-law's frigid bearing. But Moncrieffe determined to speak out with entire lack of reserve, judging that *course* wholly the best and kindest.

Blagdon always breakfasted earlier than himself, and on the morning of the day which he expected would bring him face to face with Dunstan, he made a point of meeting the master of The Terraces, just as he came indoors from one of his habitual strolls.

"Good-morning," Moncrieffe said, with neutral civility.

"Good-morning," Blagdon almost mumbled, while passing onward.

"Excuse me," came the deterring voice. "I'd like to speak with you for a few minutes. May I?" Here Moncrieffe threw open the library door, near which he was standing. "In here, if you don't object. You don't, then? Thanks."

He pushed Blagdon politely before him, and they were soon confronted in thorough privacy. Moncrieffe saw that the old man revealed a restless disinclination to seat himself. He divined that this meant latent belligerence, and treated it with seeming unconcern. He chose, on his own part, to take one of the big leathern-bottomed chairs near one of the book-lined walls.

"Mr. Blagdon," he began, loiteringly yet not at all indolently, "I have now been here at The Terraces for quite a while."

"So you have . . . so you have," came the answer, slow and chill.

"I don't just know," pursued Moncrieffe, "what your wishes may now be as to my remaining here."

"Remaining here, eh?"

"You've been very hospitable, and have shown

me much sympathy in regard to my recent illness. But of late it has seemed to me that your manner has undergone a change."

"A change? Umph! A change? Well, it had *ought* to undergone one. And you know why. You know why, and you needn't try to make out you don't."

A slumberous bluster went with this low-keyed response, and perceiving the challenge it sheathed, Moncrieffe hastened to say:

"I've attempted no real deceit with you."

"Oh, you ain't!"

"I have *not*. The first time I went to see Miss Thirlwall I told you frankly that this was my object. As frankly, now, let me ask you: Has it been your desire that I should either see this lady not at all or see very little of her?"

The heavy face had grown one dismal scowl. "Poor, dear El ain't been dead more'n a year."

"Quite true. Miss Thirlwall was no enemy of hers."

"Oh, *wan't* she?" The old man's mouth twisted itself upward, then downward, in ugly labial turmoil. "*She* used to think you was in love with her. 'Twasn't very much to go there once. But to go every day—to set folks saying that you're going to marry her on the money my child left ye—why, that's a horse of another color!"

With cheeks paling and eyes brightening, Moncrieffe replied: "Before you and I exchange a word on any other subject, let us come to a mutual understanding on this one: Why, when

I returned from Europe and looked you up, here at The Terraces, did you invite me to make this place indefinitely my home?"

"Why—did—I do that?" sullenly drowed the answer. "Why? Why, because I expected you'd stay here with me and show *her* mem'ry the respect you'd ought to show it."

A slight sneer crept between Moncrieffe's lips, but he swiftly repressed it. "You supposed, then," he said, roughly, summarily, with a little upward wave of one hand, "that I would spend years in sorrowful seclusion under the same roof with yourself."

"No," said Blagdon, firing a little. "I didn't s'pose that of you, though I *might* of some husbands who'd lost the splendid, noble, brainy, beautiful, eddercated wife *you* lost! I didn't s'pose nor expect it in *your* case. There's reasons *why* I didn't; never mind 'em. But I both s'posed and expected that you wouldn't run right away after that one girl of all others—the girl she was jealous of, and with the best o' reasons, too."

"You used the phrase 'right away,'" said Moncrieffe, after having let a short silence ensue. "It is not 'right away' with me, though I admit that it is comparatively soon. However, I can't help this. I would wait longer if the sale of the Thirlwall estate did not leave Eloise homeless. I distrust her cousin, Dunstan, and with what I hold to be very logical motives. Eloise's money, left her by her aunt, will support her if she is cast adrift, but it will not support her at all to

my liking. Hence, having engaged myself to marry her—”

“To marry her!” cried Blagdon.

“—Having engaged myself to marry her, I have gained her consent that our wedding shall be immediate. I wanted to tell you this before I told any one else, and I hope you will both comprehend and sanction the course I propose to take.”

His voice nearly failed him as he finished, for Blagdon had rushed toward him, with both up-lifted hands tight-clenched.

“You’ll marry *her*! You’ll marry that—that *nobody*! You’ll marry her, too, hardly more’n a year after you’ve buried my poor El!” The old man gasped for breath, and put one hand wanderingly, fumblingly, to his throat. He almost gnashed out the next words; fury had temporarily deformed him into a senile gnome of malice. “Then, sir, you’ll give back the million dollars my girl gave *you*! You’ll give it back, d’ye hear! It ain’t going to pay for the mud you’d like to throw on the grave o’ the dead!”

Moncrieffe conquered, though not quite, a shudder of disgust. “I will *not* give back the money,” he said. “I once offered to do so, and you refused to take it in most decisive terms. I will *not* give it back now; and your demanding that I shall do so is merely mean and cowardly.”

Choking with rage, Blagdon stuttered: “It’s well for *you* to talk of cowardice! Do you s’pose I’d have let you keep that money if I’d known you meant to play me such a scurvy trick?”

"'Twas no question of your letting me keep the money. I offered to give you what was my own before the law. And I've played you no trick, nor the faintest hint of a trick. I pitied your grief, Abijah Blagdon; and in another way I now pity your abuse. Both have possibly the same origin. But from this hour I've done with you. It isn't so much that you have said what I cannot in any circumstances pardon. It's that you have said what I could not, if I pardoned it, ever forget your having so shamed yourself as to imagine and feel."

He vanished instantly from the room, and soon made prompt preparations to leave the house. He had already visited the cottage left him by Whitewright, and he determined at once to repair thither. During his illness in Venice he had been struck with the faithful services of a French professional nurse who had attended him. This man, Pierre, he had brought with him to The Terraces. He gave Pierre certain orders, and in less than an hour after having ended his interview with Blagdon, he had quitted the home of his father-in-law forever.

He left behind him, as he well understood, a rancorous indignation. He had no knowledge, naturally, of Dunstan Thirlwall's hate, as it now burned smoldering and acrid. He was in expectation of a meeting that would not be fraught with discomfiture as he said to Ann, after reaching the cottage:

"I've come to spend the night here, and to stay for perhaps quite a while. I shall be away

all the afternoon. Some luggage of mine will arrive in an hour or so, and with it will come my servant, whose name is Pierre Trainé. He will attend to matters, buying this or that in the way of immediate necessities and conveniences, as you may direct or as he will suggest. You'll find Pierre a very nice fellow, Ann, and I'm sure you and he will get along finely together."

Meanwhile Dunstan Thirlwall was awaiting his cousin's sweetheart. This proposed marriage with Eloise had made his loathing throb like a swollen and diseased artery. Here was the man who had so successfully shouldered him aside, securing the fullest conceivable reward for his audacity and triumph. This marriage with Eloise was flavored so strongly by the tincture of meditated design! To the marriage itself Dunstan had not the faintest objection. Indeed, he preferred that it should take place, for if his vengeance were ever compassed it would be the last link in the evidential chain. And he was now the prey of a passionate fanaticism. He believed the worst, and he was harassed by a longing publicly to verify this belief. The Archibald case, scanned daily in the newspapers, kept augmenting his feverish hunger. "The fellow shan't escape me if I've got wit and will enough to trap him," passed often, nowadays, through his brain. He knew very well that he had will enough. As to the wit, he felt dubious, in the way that a bloodhound might feel, if endowed with human intelligence, regarding the surety of his trail.

That afternoon, when Dunstan appeared in the sitting-room at Greendingle, he crossed its threshold some little time before Eloise did—and aired, too, a deportment of just that bland suavity which he knew, at the needed moment, very capably how to assume.

XXIX.

MONCRIEFFE was not unprepared for a certain expression of his courtesy. But this unexpectedly warm amplitude of it, discomfited and jarred upon him. Still, he remembered Eloise's good report of her cousin's reformed manners. He concluded that he had best take advantage of their geniality, whether factitious or the reverse. And so, with the least awkward plunge into middle things that his mingled serenity and diplomacy would permit, he soon told the entire little story of his late betrothal.

"I suppose Eloise," he ended, "has made matters clear to you before this."

"Yes—yes. She has mentioned the affair. I don't know how I can answer better than by congratulating you." And here Dunstan put out his hand.

"It seems to me that there is no reason why our marriage should be delayed." And as Moncrieffe took the proffered hand he momentarily pressed it, with more warmth than he had once believed himself able, at the sharpest of requis-

tions, to show the man who was its owner. "I have understood from Eloise that your negotiations for the sale of Greendingle are now almost completed, and in that case a breaking up of the old family home must surely follow."

"The negotiations of which you speak are now entirely completed," said Dunstan. "As for your marriage with Eloise, it has my full sanction."

"Thanks. . . And oh, may I ask, Mr. Thirlwall, if you will permit little Miss Anita to remain, as of old, with her cousin?"

This was a question which Eloise had feared to frame with her own lips. Dunstan's look hardened, for a moment, and his mouth seemed to be swept by the shadow of a sneer. Then he said, so smilingly and cordially that his watcher was tempted to believe this brief change in him an illusion—

"Oh, of course. I would not think of separating Nita from her devoted friend."

Just then Eloise entered the room, her face and movements all graceful shyness; and at once Dunstan addressed her.

"We were speaking, Eloise, of Nita remaining your companion after you and Dr. Moncrieffe are married. I consent gladly to this plan."

The rosy color shot into Eloise's cheeks; but embarrassment was whelmed in gratitude. Her eyes were sparkling richly as she fixed them on Dunstan,

"Oh, it will be so pleasant to keep Nita! I—I can't find words for my thanks!"

"Nita might naturally prefer Mr. Blagdon's

home to Greendingle, if you should decide to bring her there," said Dunstan, affably. He glanced toward Moncrieffe.

The latter made quick reply. "The Terraces and I have parted company for good. I'm at present in the cottage poor Magnus Whitewright left me. That is to be my home, hereafter, as far as Riverview is concerned."

Eloise started. "There's been trouble?" she murmured.

"Yes—there's been trouble," said Moncrieffe.

"About . . . our engagement?" the girl questioned.

"I'll tell you all some other time," Moncrieffe returned, low of voice.

"When I'm not here, he means," Dunstan smiled, and the smile had a queer brightness in it that repelled both his hearers, they could not for their lives have alleged why.

"Oh, I'll tell it now," hastened Moncrieffe, with apologetic promptitude. And in another minute, as he considered how awkward would be the telling of it there and then, Dunstan gave his head an amiable toss.

"Pray defer the telling if you wish, Dr. Moncrieffe," he said. "For my own part, I'm not curious after disagreeable recitals, just now. Those two hours or so of dry business this morning didn't put me in the best of humors; and after luncheon I took up a newspaper only to find it packed with fresh details about that Archibald poisoning case."

"What a great excitement it is making," said

Eloise, a little absently. Her mind was busy-ing itself with the most supposable reason for this sudden quarrel between Blagdon and his son-in-law.

"The excitement isn't remarkable," Dunstan seemed to muse aloud. "This man, Archibald, was a Brooklyn physician of the very best standing. His wife died a lingering death at the age of about two-and-thirty. He was in constant attendance at her bedside for several weeks. She died quite suddenly, one day, and there was no suspicion of his having poisoned her—"

"Poisoned her!" broke sharply from Moncrieffe.

"As I was saying," Dunstan quietly went on, "there had been no suspicion of his having poisoned her until two of her relatives, who had expected legacies from her and did not receive them, began to collect evidence."

"What sort of evidence?" asked Moncrieffe.

As he spoke, Eloise looked at him sharply. She was seated quite near him, and a change in his color had caught her heed. She remembered those dizzy seizures of which he had told her, and one of which she had not long ago witnessed.

"You're . . . you're not quite well?" she quickly asked him, half below her breath, leaning forward.

"I?" he answered, lightly. "Why, yes. What made you think otherwise?"

Here Dunstan went placidly on. "The evidence these two angered old ladies got was chiefly from servants in the household, one of whom

was a hired nurse. It all seemed rather flimsy, at first, but Dr. Archibald's marked attentions to a lady with whom he had formerly been on intimate terms, gave it rather startling weight. Then came his engagement to this lady, indecently expeditious, it must be owned, whether he was innocent or guilty. The exhumation of Mrs. Archibald's body followed, and its stomach was found to contain a large quantity of morphine. . . Will you smoke, Dr. Moncrieffe?" And Dunstan held out his silver cigarette-case.

"Thanks—no. I—er—I haven't smoked since my illness. You've brought back this Archibald matter to my mind. The trial was about to take place when I left this country. While abroad I remember seeing in an American paper that the jury had disagreed as to a verdict."

"And since your return, I suppose," said Dunstan, with the nicest nonchalance, "you've no doubt forgotten to observe the chronicling in the newspapers of this second trial."

Moncrieffe stammered, flushing. "No—I. . . Yes—that is, I *did* glance over an account of the new coming trial yesterday. I—I *believe* it was yesterday; possibly it may have been this morning. Oh, yes—on—on second thought I—I find it *was* yesterday."

With great smoothness Dunstan proceeded: "The new trial will probably convict Archibald. It will be an affair of great interest for those who like such morbid disclosures."

"I'm not among that class," exclaimed Eloise, with a timorous laugh. "I shan't read a word

more of the affair. Thank Heaven" (and she stole a glance at her new lover) "I shall have sunnier things to think about."

Dunstan had lighted his cigarette. He looked at a limber blue coil of smoke poised in the still air of the room. "Upon my word," he said, lazily, "I begin to fancy that you've been making sport of me, Dr. Moncrieffe."

"Pray, how is that?" came the flurried answer.

"Why, you're quite as well acquainted with this whole ugly business as I am, and yet you've allowed me to narrate it as if you were the most uninformed of listeners." Here Dunstan gave a mellow and jocose giggle, stretching himself a little in his chair, as though under the drowsy spell of the cigarette.

"You've revived the whole unpleasant history for me," said Moncrieffe; and he ended his words with a broken laugh, at which Eloise again turned toward him, knitting her brows puzzledly. "I—er—I must confess that you've done so with some graphic force."

"Force?" drawled Dunstan, good-humoredly. "You make me feel like a newspaper reporter;" and he daintily blew another thin smoke-wreath. "It's wonderful how those fellows embellish and amplify their 'stories,' as I've heard that they call them. I dare say we'll have a lot of them down here at Riverview when the old cemetery's torn into fragments."

"Torn into fragments!" Eloise echoed. "Oh, I *hope* it won't be as bad as *that*, Dunstan!"

"No, of course not," her cousin returned; "but

they're going to take a bigger slice out of the northwest side than I had any idea of."

Eloise rose alarmedly, clasping both hands together. "Oh, *Dunstan!*" she cried. "You don't mean that anything will happen to *our* plot?—You don't mean that Aunt Emily—?"

"No; no. *We're* all right." As he spoke, Dunstan looked straight at Moncrieffe, his eyelids narrowing their interspace. "But I'm afraid Mr. Blagdon will be very sorry to learn that *his* plot must go. There's only a single grave there, it's true. But I found out this morning, from one of the railway agents, that . . m—m . . . your late wife's coffin must be displaced."

"Displaced!" Eloise shivered aloud. "Oh, how dreadful!"

"This man," Dunstan went on, "was plainly impressed by the fact of Mr. Blagdon's great wealth, and also by that of a superb and very costly marble monument having been lately reared to Mrs. Moncrieffe's memory. He asked me if I thought Mr. Blagdon would be inclined to rebel against the desecration, and I answered him that I didn't see how he could very well do so. I said to him that the power of the railway company was now supreme, and that although Mr. Blagdon might come in for a big emolument (which no doubt would be to him mournfully ridiculous) he could not in any conceivable way resist the pressure enforced upon him. His daughter's grave must unquestionably be opened and her coffin taken from it."

For a few seconds, during the final delivery of these placid sentences, Dunstan's eyes were fixed like two dull and steady stars upon the face of Moncrieffe. He now saw that face whiten. Darting up from his seat, soon afterward, he cried: "See, Eloise! Dr. Moncrieffe is ill!"

But Eloise had already seen. She sank on her knees at Moncrieffe's side, and caught his hand. It was cold, and his head had fallen with oblique swerve on a rear abutment, luckily cushioned, of the chair in which he sat. It now rested there, very peaceably. His eyes were closed. He had swooned quite away.

XXIX.

"BASIL, I'm so glad! You're better—I can see that you are! Your color's coming back. Don't rise. Just lie here for a little while longer."

Moncrieffe swept floorward with one elbow a toppling promontory of pillow, and then gave a dorsal push that told him of other pillows not easily dislodged. He drew a great sigh, and half rose.

"You've put me here on this lounge?"

"Yes, Basil. It was only a step away from the chair in which—"

"I fainted. Yes. I see, Eloise. . . And who did me this kind service?"

"Oh, Dunstan and I together moved your chair, and then—"

"I see, again. You spilled me over into the lounge, as it were." By this time Moncrieffe was sitting up and gazing about him. "Where is—?" He paused, and gave his beard one or two uneasy hand-strokes. "Where is your cousin?"

"Dunstan? He was here a short time ago. I think he will return soon."

"I—I wasn't long like this?"

"My dear Basil, you came to yourself, I should say, in about three minutes."

"And all these pillows?" he replied, laughing bleakly, as he began to rise. "You couldn't have had time— No, I see; they were heaped pell-mell on the lounge. I—I remember noticing yesterday what a pretty effect they made. . ." He spoke loiteringly, wanderingly, while regaining his feet. "Eloise."

"Well, Basil?"

"I—" He seized her with mild violence in his arms and held her to his breast, kissing her brow and cheeks.

"It was too bad, Basil! I know that trouble with Mr. Blagdon helped it. And the trouble was about me! But you must not talk much. You must either lie down again here, or let me drive with you home—to your new home, I mean."

"My old one, Eloise. You forget how I lived there with Magnus Whitewright before . . . before I ever set foot within The Terraces. I'll go out now with you. You'll come along at my side for a little distance, won't you? The walk

is only about a mile; you'll go half of it with me, I'm sure."

"Basil! You mustn't dream of walking!"

"My dear child, I feel as strong as a horse. Trust me; I'm quite sure of myself."

"But you're still pale, and you seem excited, somehow."

"Oh, that will wear off as we stroll on and talk to one another. I've something . . . something I would specially like to tell you."

"And you say that so solemnly! Of course I know what it is. . . ." On a sudden she clung to him, tremblingly. "But, Basil, that attack was so horrid! You must *not* tax your strength by walking!"

"The air will refresh me, dear. It's a perfect afternoon." He drew her out into the hall, where his hat and a light overcoat were in easy reach. "Shall you need a wrap? Ah, here's a jacket, and a hat as well. Let me help you on with both. I'll prove to you how much better I am."

While he was holding the jacket so that she could slip her arms into its sleeves, Elois  flurriedly said: "But ought you not to wait and see Dunstan? I am sure he means to return soon. I don't know where he can have gone. He left the room just after we both made sure that you were really better. You opened your eyes, you know, and seemed quite conscious. You murmured something in a low voice which I could not catch. Possibly Dunstan caught it. . . . I don't know. He left the room quite

quickly. I thought he had gone for some reviving drink—I imagine that he did go with that purpose. Do let us wait! Or shall I try to find him, and—?”

“No, no, Eloise. Come with me. There will be no reviving drink better than this fresh evening air and your sweet company.”

They were soon on the lawn together, walking slowly, with her arm inside his own and her hand clasping his wrist.

“You see,” he broke silence, when they were well away from the house, “I’m no longer the least ill.”

“But, Basil,” she said, with tremors of anxiety, “it seems to me that your health must still be very frail for such attacks as these to afflict you.”

“The other day that vertigo came, as you saw, but not so severely. To-day there were reasons—”

“Reasons? Ah, I knew it! Mr. Blagdon’s behavior—his indignation, very possibly, at our engagement.”

“True, he both shocked and wounded me, Eloise. But that whole affair has really cost me very little actual distress. I was beyond the reach of his wrath, which was absurd, however pathetic. Let me tell you just what course this foolish old man chose to take.” He then spoke at some length, and yet falteringly now and then, as though his mind dwelt on other things. And suddenly he broke off, devouring Eloise’s face with a strange, worried look—

"Oh, why concern ourselves about *this*, my love, when something far more momentous looms up between you and me?"

"Basil! Something far more momentous? What is it? Tell me—tell me."

"I *will* tell you, Eloise," Moncrieffe said, very gravely. "Your cousin believes that I poisoned my wife."

"Basil! Basil!"

"It's true, Eloise. Blagdon, quite unwittingly, told me of questions he had asked. I never suspected, then. I'm certain now. Dunstan hated me for marrying Elma. He studied this Archibald poisoning case, and his vile impulse of revenge has taken one stealthy and sluggish form."

"Oh, Basil, Basil, what *are* you saying!"

"The truth, my dear Eloise."

"But you only suspect—"

"I feel—I know. Listen: It is true that I, like this Dr. Archibald, might be convicted of murder."

"No—no—no! *Basil!*"

"It *is* true, Eloise." He laughed, wildly, wearily, for a second. "Outrageous fortune!" he cried, as if to the glooming trees about him, to the empurpled heaven above him. "What happened was this. . ." And then he told her of the drug he had got from Whitewright, of its failure to bring relief, of his having carelessly left it at Elma's bedside, of its consumption by her with evident suicidal motive. After that he related how he had spoken his inadver-

tent "Thank God" and how Blagdon had heard her miserable murmur, "You want me to die."

"But your innocence—your complete innocence!" Eloise protested. "It could not possibly go for nothing!"

"Not with circumstance blackening and strangling it? The disruption of this graveyard—of the Blagdon plot there—is to Dunstan like a personal providential stroke of aid. He has talked with Mr. Blagdon and become convinced that I killed my wife. That fainting-spell has probably clinched his belief. His next step will be to seek my father-in-law and lay bare all his suspicions. Of course Blagdon, now that he has quarreled with me, will be prone to credit Dunstan's words. They will horrify him, fill him with indignation, and they will also penetrate him with a desire to place the exhumed body of his daughter under closest medical scrutiny."

As he ended, Moncrieffe placed his elbow against the trunk of a huge yellow-leaved walnut, and leaned thus with drooped head, his posture full of sorriest dejection.

Eloise, stricken with terror and yet fighting against it with distrust born of hope, seized his arm and poured upon his downcast face the light of her pleading eyes.

"Oh, Basil, it *may* turn out this way, but still there's amplest room for doubt! Dunstan is possibly *not* bent on your ruin in this crafty and barbarous way!"

He met her look. His own was very mourn-

ful. "Eloise, darling, it adds a new pain to my sorrow that I should gloom your spirit with these grim forebodings!"

His eyes fixed themselves, now, on the massed magnificence of the sunset. The clouds were all drenched with a dull splendor; their tints had grown lambent, like those in rubies or opals when some blaze has bathed them just remotely enough not to strike rays from their facets. It was all a gorgeous pageant of autumnal color, and yet the muffled sun behind it kept real brilliancy in smoldering abeyance. Here was the decay of sunshine rather than its glorious death. The tangle of tints while it brightened had become brooding, baleful, sinister; and the ebon silhouettes of the fir-trees, etched against it, took elfin contours, like those of leering and scowling profiles.

"Look," he pursued, pointing westward with one uplifted hand. "That is the very emblem of *his* sullen and poisonous hate. Oh, you knew him of old, Eloise, and so did I, and so (peace rest her!) did the lovely mother whose days were shortened by his churlish acts. . . . But come, now. We must part here. You're with me, my love? If not, tell me so in full frankness. I shan't reproach you. Only, there's this, Eloise: if you consent to share my fate it may cost you terrible torment."

"I would share it, Basil, if it cost me centuries of torment."

She said this without a touch of what the cynics might have called melodrama. She said

it very firmly and simply, and she added, a minute later:

"You're ill, Basil. Send for me to-morrow at the cottage, if you don't feel well enough to come to Greendingle. I'll go there. If it's found out that I've gone I shan't care. Propriety, and all that, would be nothing if my presence there could give you the least relief."

"Eloise!"

He caught both her hands. His lips were trembling as he spoke again, and his eyes burned into hers.

"Why not come there to-morrow, once and for all? We could be married with great privacy. I could arrange everything and meet you in the little church that's hardly a stone-throw from my own dwelling. If I ask too much, dearest, tell me so, and there's an end. If not—"

But she receded from him, though her eyes were sparkling with tears.

"So soon—so soon, Basil? Yes, you do ask too much!"

A long, voluminous breeze, the dreamy precursor of coming night, swept flutteredly through the darkened treetops. To Moncrieffe it was like the scornful yet melancholy echo of his own entreaty. To Eloise it shivered with omen, and seemed an invisible courier of disaster, of despair.

XXX.

A FEW earlier stars had already begun to sprinkle the cool autumn heaven in their stealthy, bediamonding way. Eloise had reached home. She passed through the hall and entered the sitting-room. No lamps had yet been lighted here, but a fire was flickering on the hearth, and the walls and ceiling were overdanced by fitful shadows. One of these shadows seemed suddenly to resolve itself into a human figure—Dunstan's. He came forward from a rear part of the chamber, doubtless having entered it by another door.

In silence they fronted one another. The fire-light so flashed upon Dunstan's face that she saw there, in a trice, the new expression which clothed it. That completely had altered. Never, in all her past experiences of this man, had she seen him wear a more sneering malignity.

He spoke first. "I saw you leave the lawn some time ago with Moncrieffe."

"Yes."

"He recovered from his fainting-spell rather quickly, did he not?"

"Yes . . . and no sooner had he felt better than he wished to go out into the air. But I thought you would return, Dunstan, before he had time to do so. I imagined that you had gone to get some restorative for him."

Up to this moment Eloise believed there was still strong chance that Moncrieffe had erred in his theory of her cousin's persecuting hatred. But Dunstan's next words flung all such faith to the winds.

"I went for no purpose of the sort. I went because it sickened me to stay in the same room with him. Oh, I mean to play open-handedly enough, now. I've suspected for a long time; now I'm certain."

Eloise felt her flesh turn icy. "Certain of what, Dunstan?" she managed.

"That he poisoned his wife."

In the silence that followed this torturing phrase Eloise turned and stared into the crackling and volatile fire. Its flame seemed to gibber at her with countless little spiteful upthrust tongues.

"If he *has* done this damnable thing," she heard Dunstan's voice ring coldly on, "he can't escape a public trial for it any more than Archibald, of whose present predicament he tried blunderingly to show himself ignorant. He can fly anywhere he pleases, but the law, in these days of telegraphs and bloodhound detectives, will drag him back. Even without the exhuming of his wife's body and the examination of certain viscera, evidence of great convicting strength could be brought against him. He undoubtedly knew of Elma's will, leaving him a million dollars. She herself kept repeating to him in piteous tones that he wanted her to die. He forgot himself, one day, just before her

death, in speaking to her father. 'This is almost the end,' he said, '*and thank God for it!*' Fine words, truly, from a husband whose wife lay dying a few yards away! That he had been giving her morphine too, is beyond a shadow of doubt. He told his father-in-law that he was doing so, and with feeble results. Feeble results, indeed! The very lameness of this story would turn half the medical world against him. . . . And now, at last, when I sprung my trap on him, you yourself saw how horror threw him into cowardly collapse. He knows that the proof of his guilt lies there in that grave. It was exploding a bombshell to him, in his fancied security, when I stated that the Blagdon plot must go, and *her* grave be opened."

Eloise stood staring into the fire, perfectly motionless, as before. Then it flashed through her mind that this very inertia might seem hurtful to the cause of the man whose innocence she, of all others, ought most firmly to defend. She turned, the next instant, and re-surveyed Dunstan's firelit face.

"Everything you say," she answered, "is to me ridiculous."

"Ridiculous, eh?" he scoffed.

"In its improbability—yes. But in its cruelty and malice, hideous. You hate him, and you have shown your hate like the worst of cowards. Your kindlier bearing toward me, after your mother died, is explained, now. One hate eclipsed the other; you forgot to treat me un-

civilly, so bent had you become on trying to ruin a man who never in the least wronged you."

She saw his face twitch and grow bloodless in the glamorous light. "I don't know what you call wronging me. However, my motive is not one of revenge. I am acting in the name of pure justice."

"As if I believed that, Dunstan Thirlwall!" she cried. "As if any one who knew you *could* believe it!" She had never spoken to him before in this untrammelled way; her daring was the daring of desperation. "Your motive has been revenge, and you do not speak the truth when you say that you have been urged by any other. You wished to marry Elma Blagdon for the worldliest of worldly reasons. You were fierce in your resentment against Basil Moncrieffe because you thought that he had deliberately shouldered you aside and married the woman whom your ambition and avarice had singled out. But Elma Blagdon would never have married you. She would never have married any one except *him*. And in her imperious way she—she almost dragged him into an engagement with her. Basil went to her father's house on the night of that engagement without the faintest expectation that it would occur. You know what the woman was. He knew also—everybody in Riverview had long known. Basil, like most men, was human—fallibly so, if you please. Elma, beyond doubt, was determined to make him her husband. She suc-

ceeded, though he married her without the desire of personal advancement, profit, gain!"

"I see. I see perfectly. This is the story that he has told you. He has told it, after he has become a widower with a million dollars, in order to smooth over the fact of his having jilted you a year or so ago."

"That," gasped Eloise, "is utterly and shamelessly false. Basil had never asked me to marry him. He had never spoken to me a single loving word. His betrothal to Elma Blagdon did not mean the vaguest treachery to myself. I told you this before, and I tell it you again. I cast back the lie—"

"Be careful, Eloise!" He came closer to her; his face was now more shadowed, but still distinct.

"Those are just the words you spoke to me that evening when your mother still lived, and as I defied you then, with her lovely sympathy and support behind me, so I defy you now when I am bereft of both. Yes, Dunstan, I cast back the lie in your face then, as I cast it back now. You soiled yourself grossly as a gentleman when you presumed to tell me that Basil Moncrieffe had thrown me over, had tossed me aside like an old glove. Those were your words, and I remember them, as we remember things that were far better forgotten with disdain."

He came still nearer to her, and the altering glow on his face gave her the dread (as it had once given her, months before, beneath this same roof) that he might strike her with his hand.

But he chose to strike her with his tongue, instead—and tellingly, in a way that his fixed certainty of her lover's guilt made him sure would sting and ache.

"All you've said about Moncrieffe's reluctance to engage himself to Miss Blagdon—about Elma's having *almost dragged him into an engagement with her*—will serve as excellent evidence at the coming trial."

She drew haughtily backward, though the poor, fear-smitten heart was sinking in her bosom.

"Sometimes those French novels that you're so fond of contain a certain word—*blague*. I can't help telling you that I'm rather strongly reminded of it by your pompous and threatening talk."

"Of course you defend him," came the answering sneer, after a slight silence during which she watched the knot in his throat rise and fall, as though he were literally choking down the rage she had roused. "Of course you do. He's consented to marry you at last—you, a bastard!"

The fiery tears sprang to her eyes, but she said nothing.

"He's consented to give you a name, and God knows you needed one, badly enough. Your father hadn't the decency to do it—"

"But your mother had," she shot in, "and you were too base and sordid to honor her for it! You've called me by *that name* for the first time in your life, Dunstan, though more than once

you've hinted that you wanted to call me by it. Well, perhaps you're right. But when I think of the sweet and noble life—your mother's life—that you grieved and wounded with your bloodless ingratitude and selfishness, I can't help feeling that her spirit, if it could look on us both now, would claim me as her true child and reject you as her false—unnatural as you've always been, unfeeling, watching for her death, and glad of the gain that you got from it."

He slipped close to her side as she ended these words. She heard a loud sigh of exasperation gush from his lips. His face was in dense shadow, now; the firelight had faded into a few yellow flickerings and flutters. For a moment she waited, thinking what he might do and feeling her own powerlessness. Then she heard his voice ring out in strident irony as he passed beyond her.

"I'll see, if I can, that you make a very brilliant marriage. You'll get a celebrated husband, unless I'm devilishly in error. 'Mrs. Murderer Moncrieffe' will look well on your visiting cards. Perhaps it will please you more than 'Miss Bastard Thirlwall.' "

In a few more minutes Eloise realized that she was alone. Her heart seemed to bound in her breast; something had begun to throb at the roots of her tongue, and her lips felt burningly dry.

"Shall I stay here another night?" whirled through her thought. . . Then she crouched before the fire and shivered there in the darkness.

"Where can I go until to-morrow?" she moaned aloud, not knowing that the words had escaped her.

"Miss Eloise."

She rose, a little giddily, to her feet. "It's you, Margaret?"

"Yes, miss."

She caught the strong arms of Anita's nurse. It was so good to feel something both strong and friendly at such a moment.

"Oh, Margaret, I'm glad you came and found me here! I—I wanted you. Perhaps you heard—But never mind that. Margaret, when I'm calmer I'm going to write Dr. Moncrieffe a letter. Will you promise that it shall be safely delivered him?"

"Yes, Miss Eloise. You can trust me. I'll have it sent."

"Not to Mr. Blagdon's, though—not to The Terraces." And then she gave full further explanations and directions. . . "Now come with me to my room. Let me put my arm in yours—like that, Margaret. We'll go upstairs together. And—and afterward I've something else to say to you. The letter must go first, though, if I can only write it . . . if I can only write it!"

"Oh, you can, miss, you can," comforted Margaret, who was fondly attached to her, and who had rejoiced at her betrothal almost as keenly as she had sorrowed at the death of her aunt. "When we get upstairs I'll bathe your head—oh, how hot it is! . . . And I'll rub your hands—oh, mercy, how cold *they* are! . . ."

But they were not so cold that Eloise failed, in the next few minutes, to write Moncrieffe. One sentence of her letter ran thus:

"Precisely at noon to-morrow I will meet you in the church you named, and will there become your wife."

XXXI.

AFTER she had made sure that her letter was on its way, Eloise began to dread from Dunstan some fresh offensive sign. But none came. Margaret brought little Anita to her, and she pretended that a doleful headache kept her from dinner. Anita looked incredulous, for her cousin was not given to headaches; and no amount of diplomatic persuasion could induce her to sit alone at the table with her brother. "Good Heavens!" thought Eloise, while Margaret, a little later, served them with viands it almost nauseated her to look at, but of which she feigned, because Anita was present, to partake: "what agony may the poor little thing endure when she realizes that I am gone from her forever! And *must* this happen? Who knows if it may not? What cold-blooded act would be foreign to a nature like Dunstan's?" . . .

Later, after Anita had been put to bed by her sedulous nurse, Eloise resolved on a certain *course*. She knew that Margaret would come

to her room before she retired for the night, and in this expectation she did not err.

"You see," she said, with a little half-exhausted upward wave of both hands, when Margaret had appeared.

"Miss Eloise! You're *packing*!" And then the faithful elderly creature broke into tears.

"Margaret," said Eloise, taking her hand, "I must go to-morrow, and these two small trunks which were among the luggage aunt and I had with us on our Southern trip chanced to be close at hand. So I filled them with a few things I chiefly cared to take away. But, Margaret, there are some clothes I want you to pack for me and send. I want them sent to . . . to Dr. Moncrieffe's new home—or, rather, his old one. You know, Margaret. It's where you had my letter sent this evening."

The woman's face paled with consternation; and seeing this, Eloise gave a sad, wild little laugh.

"That's to be *my* home, Margaret. I'm going to marry Dr. Moncrieffe to-morrow, in the little village church near his cottage." She spoke on, for some time, to her astonished listener, and then finally said: "Oh, Margaret, if you could bring Anita to me during the afternoon! We shan't go on any wedding-tour; for a good while, I imagine, the cottage will be our home. There are reasons why Dr. Moncrieffe should remain just here in Riverview for some time yet. A great trouble may come upon him, as I've just told you; I marry him in this way because

of this fact. Our wedding will be private, but the news of it shall at once be published everywhere. . . And now, Margaret, I—I've a great favor to ask of you."

"Yes, miss? I'd do 'most anything for you, Miss Eloise, and I guess you know it."

"Thanks, Margaret. I want you to bring Miss Anita to the cottage to-morrow afternoon at about one o'clock. It will be just as if you were taking her out for a walk, you know. Bring her there, and I mean to keep her there if I can. Of course, if Mr. Thirlwall claims her, insists on her coming back, I can do nothing. But that will be no affair of yours. You'll just bring her to me—to *us*; will you do this for me, Margaret?"

"Yes, miss."

"Thanks—thanks! . . . And as for these traps, you may send them to the cottage any time during the afternoon—these and others, any others that you may be sure of as really my possessions. You know the two or three trunks that actually belong to me, and you know all my clothes. Those jewels that Aunt Emily left me in her will I shall take on my own person. Then, Margaret, if you will come yourself to the cottage by evening, or later, you can stay with me—with Miss Anita and me—and be to us there just as good and affectionate a servant and companion as you have always been to us here. But first of all try to bring me Miss Anita. Let that be your one chief, *ruling* motive after I've gone." . . .

The next morning dawned clear, cool and brilliant. Eloise had passed a night half of insomnia, half of torturing dreams. Margaret brought breakfast upstairs to her. Anita appeared, with bothering questions about her headache. The hours dragged terribly. Ten o'clock came, and she learned that Dunstan had ordered a horse and wagon from the stables. By half-past ten she also learned, with a pang of mixed joy and dread, that he had driven away from Greendingle.

"He has gone," she told herself, "to talk with Mr. Blagdon. Well, let him go."

The coast was quite clear, now. She left the house, a little while afterward, with quite her usual air and attire. Margaret had managed, meanwhile, to amuse and detain Anita in one of the upper rooms.

"Good-by, dear old Greendingle!" Eloise murmured half aloud, as she paused on the lawn for a moment. Then she asked herself if ever to any girl, in all the stories that she had read or heard, had befallen an austerer wedding-morning.

And yet . . . the sun shone brightly, the crisp air was vigor and stimulus in every breath of it, the bridegroom that she loved awaited her scarcely a mile away.

Just beyond the portals of the plain little church she found that he indeed awaited her, and with quiet yet intense raptures of welcome.

The short and simple ceremony soon made

them man and wife. When it was over Eloise said to her husband:

"Stay here, and give those instructions to your witnesses about the full and wide publication of the wedding."

She herself went alone to the cottage, meeting old Ann there, who had heard the truth and held ready for her a big bouquet of asters, culled from the autumn garden.

Moncrieffe soon joined her. "What an anxious bride!" he said, kissing her on the lips. They had met in the room hallowed by memories of Magnus Whitewright. A big blaze of logs cheerily sputtered on the hearth. "Oh, my darling," he went on, "if by marrying you I could only feel that you have accepted nothing from me but happiness!"

"It's priceless happiness, Basil," she murmured, "to feel that I have now the right to share with you this horrible persecution, which is imminent, unavoidable."

"Eloise! Your letter hinted of *something*. Tell it me in full."

She spoke with complete unreserve of what had passed on the previous night. When she had finished, Moncrieffe drew a great sigh, while his gaze wandered drearily about the room.

"Was I not sure? And you doubted. But I felt that man's hate of me; I felt his thirst, silly yet terrible, for a vengeance over which he had pondered and brooded.—Ah," he broke off, "my old desk! Blagdon no doubt had it *sent here this morning while I was away.*"

They both went and stood by the desk—an old-fashioned and valueless affair enough—while Moncrieffe opened it with one of the keys he always carried on his person.

"I had it taken from here when I—" He stopped short.

"When you married Elma Blagdon," she supplied.

"Yes."

"And now her father has returned it to you?"

"Yes. It's a queer memento, Elise, of my queer and recent past. See; the pigeon-holes are full of incongruous driftings." He drew forth paper after paper. "A letter from your dear aunt. . . My first prescription as a full-fledged physician; I made a copy of it for sentimental reasons. . . An undergraduate essay on the Structure of the Human Heart which I sent to a medical review in serene confidence, and got back again in scornful surprise. . . A few affectionate lines from dear old Magnus. . . Well, I wonder if he sees us now, Eloise?" And Moncrieffe turned, pressing her to his breast.

"I am certain of it, Basil!"

"Then I am certain that he is glad! Still, a sense of my own selfishness weighs on me with fearful force!"

"Selfishness! Oh, Basil, you *shall* not speak like that!" She laid her head sideways against his heart, as though listening to the strokes it made. "What you call selfishness I call the largest and richest generosity."

"Generosity!"

"Oh, I'm not speaking of my former namelessness—of my now owning a *real* name (think of it!) for the first time in my life. And I'm not speaking of the money you tell me you're now master over. Neither seems of the faintest import to me, Basil, beside the title of being simply your wife—beside the wealth of simply owning your love!"

"To tell how thankful that answer makes me, Eloise, I should speak to your naked soul, dearest, with the lips of mine! Yet, ah, can I forget that in marrying me you have perhaps dedicated days and days of your future to grief and pain?"

"Do not *you* forget, Basil?" she replied. "Whether I had become your wife or no, would not my sufferings have been the same?"

"True," he smiled. Then, with the smile souring into a sneer, darkening into a frown, he went on: "What puppets we all are!—what puppets!"

"No, no," she dissented. "I hate to hear you speak in so hopeless a strain!"

"Eloise, Eloise!" he cried, "how can I speak in any other? What has my whole life been but one futile struggle against the ironies and persecutions of destiny? In earlier manhood I was eager for honorable distinction, and anxious to gain it by sincere, unflagging effort. I longed for friendship of the truer, finer sort, and found this in Magnus Whitewright, a man of rarest endowments and noblest character. Scarcely had I grown to love and honor him when I was called upon to witness his physical decadence—

slow but inevitably certain. It tortured me to feel that he must die, but when I met you my distress was alleviated. I loved you, and in an opposite, unpassionate way I loved your adorable aunt. Her friendship would have repaid me for the loss of Magnus. To those who honestly realize what perfect friendship means it is not so much a question of sex as of sympathy. I loved Emily Thirlwall in the same way that I had loved Magnus. If I could have changed her to a man, him to a woman, it would have made no material difference. Both were sources to me of the sweetest and deepest enjoyment. Both were doomed; both perished. But while I was forced to see the inexorable darkness threatening each—and to see it all the more keenly because of my professional training as a physician—I held myself anchored in spirit to the sweet surety of your love. You know now of the letter that I wrote you on the night when I was sent for at The Terraces. I went there with that letter next my heart. What happened there you already know. A fierce and unmerciful suasion wrought itself upon me. I yielded—but was it *I* that really yielded? Was it not an inferior, semi-dormant energy within me, tremendously tempted, and winning its power of overthrow through the impetus of that same tempting stress? Well, well, here is a question for the psychologist. I am none; I am only a commonplace country doctor, Eloise, who loved one woman with his heart, and cared for another with his senses. . . . Then came my marriage

with Elma. I had turned down a certain page in the book of my life. 'I will be loyal to her,' I said; 'I will strive to forget, and I will honorably and honoringly remember. Folk will prattle; let them. Folk will say that I married only for money—I, who have never been disturbed by a single longing after excessive wealth; let them. Folk will call me a successful fortune-hunter; let them. I have married a woman who will require from me vital verification of the promises I gave her at the altar; these promises I will study to fulfill. To have missed the greater happiness need not mean with me to ignore the finer duty. I will be true to myself, though the heavens fall.' . . . Thus I meditated, Eloise, thus I resolved!"

"And it was noble and brave of you, Basil, so to meditate, so to resolve!"

"Ah, perhaps . . . perhaps! But the heavens *did* fall—there was my horrible trouble—there, again, was the bloodhound enmity of 'outrageous fortune'! . . . What did my marriage prove? I have told you."

"You have told me, Basil, and I have shuddered at the miseries you underwent. But still"—and here Eloise lifted to him eyes brimming with love, tenderness and devotion—"you underwent them with a courage and fortitude that make me treasure you all the more!"

"I don't deserve one word of praise," he said, in solemn and self-convinced undertone. "But it still is surpassingly pleasant, Eloise, from your lips! . . . Well, then, at last my release came.

You understand? At last I was freed from that frightful enslavement."

"Yes, Basil, I understand."

He raised both hands, letting them slowly drop at his sides, while a look of agony flashed and faded on his fatigued face.

"Here I stand, now, Eloise," he broke forth, with sarcasm and sorrow mingling in his voice, "before an odious peril, unsolicited and undeserved. Elma's body, when taken from its grave, even if it does not deal me a shameful death, will doubtless damn my good name forever! And yet people talk of our succeeding because we try severely—of our accomplishing because we honestly and earnestly intend! Look at my life. Look at its struggles, and then at its defeat. Is the last a natural sequel of the first? Is not my defeat a melancholy mockery of my struggles? And if one calls this elusive element of disaster by its true name, one is frowned down as a pessimist—tedious and threadbare term! The truth is, those words, 'pessimism' and 'optimism,' should be stricken from our dictionaries, Eloise. Every man of commonly lucid judgment is an intermingling of both. Who but some cachinnating idiot would dare to say that life is all joy? Who but some absurd hypochondriac would dare to say it is all gloom? But ah, the wise man knows that its mystery of brightness and darkness is one eternal challenge to will, purpose, effort, energy, no matter how bravely or how morally each is exploited and applied!"

Just then a voice in the outside hall was heard, calling Eloise's name.

"It's Nita!" she cried. "Margaret has brought her to me!"

Anita's welcome of Moncrieffe was scarcely less ardent than that which she bestowed on Eloise. She prattled along incessantly while seated on the knee of her new cousin. She appeared thoroughly to comprehend the fact that she was in the presence of a bride and groom, and she honored the whole idea of the marriage with her gracious approval.

"Still," she objected, "I don't see why you didn't let Cousin Eloise wear a veil and a wreath. Don't all brides wear veils and wreaths? Perhaps she did, though, and has taken 'em off. No? She didn't? Well, I don't see why. And am I to stay here, now?"

"I hope so, Nita," said Moncrieffe.

"You *hope* so?" she retorted, the child lapsing strangely into the woman, as often happened with her. "Hoping isn't knowing, if you please."

"You're right, there, Nita." . . . Moncrieffe looked forlornly at his wife.

"Why do you look at Cousin Eloise like that?" queried the keen little voice. "Now, see here—see here, both of you! I won't go back to *him* alone! I won't go back unless you go, Cousin Eloise! I—I hate him, and I—I'd *die* if I had to live there without you!"

Then a paroxysm of infantile tears became ominous, and Eloise hurried to obstruct it by com-

forting phrases, many of which filled her with a repentant feeling as to their possible falsity. When Anita's anxieties had been assuaged, and after she had climbed into a chair near Moncrieffe's newly-arrived desk, and begun to busy herself by thrusting her frail little hands into its pigeonholes and other compartments, Eloise murmured to her husband:

"*Will* he insist on reclaiming her, do you think?"

"No," came the thoughtful answer. "Why should he, after all? His father's will makes him her guardian, does it not?"

"Yes."

"And gives her nothing in her own right?"

"No. There is simply a requisition that he shall shield her and treat her well. He has absolute ownership, now that his mother is dead."

"Very well. He will not then concern himself with her disappearance from Greendingle."

"But his malicious impulses—"

"Will be counteracted by his relief at being rid of her. Trust me; I am right here. He has always disliked and avoided her, as we both know. Otherwise she, poor little thing, would not so avoid and fear him now." . . . A deep, low sigh broke from Moncrieffe, while his hand stole into Eloise's. "Ah, my dear, you may have bitter troubles to face, but that, I am confident, will not be among them!"

A queer little cry just then sounded from the elfish rummager ensconced before the desk.

"How funny! Here's a letter that hasn't been opened!"

"My life," said Moncrieffe, "seems blacker with threat the more I muse upon it, Eloise."

"Don't muse upon it, then!" pleaded his wife. "Let me help you to trust in the unexpected. They say, Basil, that it always happens."

"A letter that's never been opened! Look!" And Anita flung herself round in her chair with a square white envelope uplifted triumphantly.

"What are you saying, my dear?" broke absently from Moncrieffe, who had heard her first words yet failed to heed them.

"I found it there in that little drawer," said Anita. Then the woman's drollery pushed through the child's innocence. "I hope it's got money in it! If it has, half's mine! I can set up a claim to half; can't I, Cousin Eloise?" . . .

"Good God!"

Moncrieffe had risen, taken the letter, and glanced at its outside writing. Self-reproach, and possibly self-contempt as well, were in the look he now gave Eloise.

"What is it?" she questioned quickly. "A letter you'd forgotten to open, Basil?"

"Forgotten—and culpably! It's from Magnus Whitewright."

"Magnus Whitewright! A dead man, Basil?" This fluttered from Eloise, while her cheeks whitened.

"The very night that he died Magnus wrote me a note accompanying this letter. He besought me not to open the envelope I'm now holding in my hand until three months had elapsed from the time of its receipt. Three months! Oh, Eloise, it has lain forgotten in that drawer for Heaven knows how long! And what sacred message, request, enjoiner may he not have sent me?"

With moistening eyes Moncrieffe sank into a seat. Eloise glided behind him and leaned her head over his shoulder. This is what they read together:

"OCTOBER —, 188—. *Midnight.*

"MY DEAR BASIL—You know that I am quite without fear of death, but the feeling that I may soon pass away with great suddenness has now become deeply impressed upon me. And therefore, in this letter which I shall trust implicitly that you will not open till three months after receiving it, I am impelled to make you a certain confession. By the time that you do open it, your wife will probably have ceased to live. By that time, too, you may have discovered the deception which I have used. But though at first you may feel indignant, dear Basil, I am certain that a little quiet reflection will convince you of the loving motive which has swayed me. The bottle of so-called morphine which I gave you to-night was a decoction invented by myself, and the odor and hue of pure morphine which it may have seemed to possess was entirely a result of mild dilution and harmless coloring matter. Hyoscyamus and Bromide of Sodium were the two soporific ingredients, and these were both employed with discreetest care. . . And

now, my dear Basil, should come the self-extenuating cause for my deceptive act. I have always loved you and honored you and believed in you; and yet I could not help feeling to-night, as you came to me in your weariness and despondency, that this same 'outrageous fortune' of which you and I have more than once talked together, *might* gain a hold upon you, destructive of will, rectitude, self-respect. 'Might,' I say, dear Basil, and it is because of my love that I dare to write you of my fear. It was this fear, springing from the richest affection, that made me act as I have done. If I am dead when these lines reach you, I know you will pardon and understand. If I still live and she has died, it may be different; but I will face, in that event, your indignation, and we will 'have it out together,' Basil, in belligerent earnest. If I am dead and she has survived, I shall still be sure of your leniency. But in any case I now beseech you to look on me as

"Your inalienable well-wisher,

"MAGNUS."

Eloise and Moncrieffe finished this mightily important letter at almost one and the same moment.

She slipped round his chair and sank at his feet. Their eyes were riveted to one another's in a gaze of immeasurable joy and relief.

"Basil!" cried Eloise. "It is vindication, salvation! Dunstan will be powerless, now!"

Anita came trotting up to them. "Cousin Eloise, why do you do that? Has Dr. Moncrieffe been cross to you, and are you asking him to forgive you?"

Eloise, still kneeling, drew the fragile little

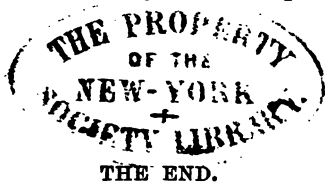
shape close to her side. But her look did not leave Moncrieffe's as she murmured:

"No, darling, fortune has been cross to both of us, but it has grown kind again, and I am asking Dr. Moncrieffe (your Cousin Basil, now, you know) to forgive fortune, and not to call it so very 'outrageous' any more."

"Fortune? fortune?" said Anita, not liking this vague answer, and yet seeing on the faces of her two friends a look that was happy enough to rally and accentuate her precarious good-humor. "What do you mean by 'fortune'? Is it anything like—like the good fairies in the stories that you and Margaret tell me?"

Moncrieffe had clasped Eloise's hand with one of his own. But he reached out the other and let it drop fondlingly on Anita's head.

"Yes, my dear," he answered. "It is like one of those same good fairies, and to-day it has taken your shape. Though we were married without you this morning, Nita, you have still been our bridesmaid, and the luckiest and most blessed bridesmaid any wedded pair has ever known!"









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